LOVAT DICKSON'S MAGAZINE

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G. Manning-Sanders	**THE TICKET GAME**	687
D. H. Lawrence	**THE WITCH A LA MODE**	697
V. Nobokov-Sirin	**THE PASSENGER**	719
Orgill MacKenzie	**THE DEVOTED COUPLE**	726
Basil Freestone	**THE DAWN**	743
Jane England	**KNIGHT-ERRANT**	747
Nora Lloyd	**JOHNNY DOLAN**	758
Christopher Christian	**THE PICTURE**	773
Struthers Burt	**ENTERTAINING THE ISLANDERS**	783
	OUR CONTRIBUTORS	808

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things in comparison. They come closest to life because they depict the variety of life, and because they ponder and weigh the inscrutabilities that direct the growth of character and motivate human action. Life is not always grim and earnest, but often, where deep emotions are involved, it seems to lose its superficialities and pretences and to appear in that unaccustomed guise a trifle more grave than it actually is.

But when the choice is between superficiality and sincerity, the way of this Magazine is clear. Those madcap expositions of human emotions involved in domestic triangles, if they have nothing to recommend them but sprightly dialogue or a new slant on seduction, may occupy themselves hilariously elsewhere. The aspects of life most entertaining to the thoughtful observer are the reactions of human conduct to the constantly changing design of existence; and in a truthful presentation of some of these aspects this Magazine seeks, and it believes it is finding, justification for its existence.

GEORGE MANNING-SANDERS

The Ticket Game

Just before sunrise two elderly men were jogging in a pony cart on the highway from an isolated village to the market town. The driver was small and monkey-like; he wore earthy corduroy clothes, and his sharp little eyes surveyed the fields with professional interest, while his tongue clicked continual encouragement to the plodding pony. The passenger was a heavy, discontented-looking man, wearing old-fashioned clothes much too small for him. He was staring moodily at the pony's flank, and he turned frequently, as if to assure himself that a battered metal trunk had not fallen out of the cart.

"It's funny you setting forth so early, Simon," said the driver inquisitively.

"It would be funnier if I stayed longer, for what I've put up with these last years from that wife of mine would be wrong for human lip to tell."

"Oh, so it's that way, is it?" said the driver, brightening with interest. "I did hear a bit of talk in the pub, but I couldn't make head or tail of it. Some reckoned your missis had turned you to doors, and others were saying you'd been nasty toward her and had a fear of the law."

"It's dark lies they tell," said the passenger energetically.

" I've never so much as raised eyebrow against her; it's she that makes my life a thing of shivers and starts. You up and deny everything they say, Bob—you tell 'em straight that I'm the most wronged man in the parish."

" When I've heard more, I'll exercise my mind upon it, but not before; for right's right," said the driver, with judicial severity. " Though this I will say—it's a great wrong, or a great something or other, that sends a man of your age journeying forth in the stark early morning."

" I'll tell you all about it, Bob," said the passenger impulsively, " and then you will be able to stand up for me. Now, my missis is stupidly contrary, and you know the kind of man I am ? "

" Moody and short-tempered, by all accounts," said the driver sympathetically.

" I'm not, or I'd never have been for so long with one master; but if I was queer-tempered, whose fault would it be ? Why, her's. She was born to aggravate me, and she has always done so from my first asking her to marry me when she was a servant at the big house same as I was. Yes, for five years she wouldn't say aye or nay to me, and there was I like a pea on a hot shovel. I was forty-two years of age when I married her, and I wish now I'd waited till I was a hundred and two."

" But I've heard tell that what's hard won is well won," said the driver.

" It's a deal I have to tell; if you keep on interrupting so, I'll not get finished," said the passenger irritably.

The driver apologised.

" And now," said the passenger, " what I'm thankfullest for is that, she having money of her own left to her by the old master same as I had, I'm free to leave with all that's mine, and put her to no want."

"Very proper, too, because if it weren't so you'd have regrets, and regrets, I've heard, is like a rat—for ever chewing at your belly," said the driver, with considerable unction. "But now you be a free man, Simon, and can live out your few years at Brighton or London town, and be as wicked as you've a mind to be. I envy you, boy—from my heart I do."

"Where was I?" said the aggrieved passenger. "Well, we hadn't been married long before I began to take notice of Ann's vexing ways. What ways? Why, how she spraddled over the fire so that there's no room for a man to get his share of comfort; and how she'll read the newspaper with a crinkling and a rattling that's enough to keep a man from snoozing beside his own hearth same as he belongs to."

"I've heard tell," said the driver softly, "that married folk be much like a pair of hosses in harness—one can't pull without the other."

"Yes, but I'd lived an unmarried man for so much of my life, I'd collected a few good habits," said the passenger with dignity.

"Ah—now what might they be?" said the driver, winking at the hedge.

"Why, little things, but very important for all that: a hot bottle in bed, winter and summer, and my bedroom door open as well as the window; and go to rest early and uprise early, and have no one speak to me when I'm reading, because then I lose the sense of the printed word. . . . But there, boy, if I told you all the nice ways I'd got habited to, 'twould take me hours and hours."

"I've heard tell that a man of character is more full of whims than sense," said the driver slyly.

"That's it, boy—you've hit it exactly," said the delighted passenger. "I'm a man of character, and always have been;

and my missis, being just ordinary, doesn't understand me. As I was saying, it was in the second or maybe the third year we were together that I spent a sleepless night and made my threat."

"Eh, what threat?" said the driver, almost pulling up the pony in his interest.

"This threat I'm carrying out now—to go abroad and never come back."

The driver stopped his pony with a jerk. "Do you mean to tell me that you're crossing the ocean?"

"I do."

"And never more to set eyes on the land that reared you?"

"I mean that."

"But they'll bury you out there—not even your clay will come back to where it belongs?" said the driver, his monkeyish face contorted into an expression of wonder and awe.

"I know all about that," said the passenger, as, fumbling in his pocket, he produced a folded piece of paper with very frayed edges. "There you are—that's my boat-ticket, and it cost me a lot of money."

The driver examined the paper respectfully. "But," said he, "it's dated ten year back; you'll not be able to use this."

"There's a bit of history about that ticket—how's the time going, boy?"

"Much as ever catch the train," said the driver, encouraging his pony into a trot.

"Perhaps there's another train would suit me just as well; or, for that matter, I could take lodging in the town and go on to-morrow. Did you notice anything at all uncommon about my missis when you come to fetch me away this morning?"

"I can't say I did, because I wasn't taking any particular notice. What might you mean now?"

"I was wondering if you thought she looked anyways cast down at having driven me to doors."

"I've heard it said that plump women hide both their fancies and their facts," said the driver. "But what about that out-of-date ticket?"

"Well, some years ago that woman of mine got so outright nasty I threatened I'd leave her, and that quieted her for a time. But by and by she got like a thing used to the threat, so on a day I lost my temper and away to go to a shipping agent in the town and bought this ticket to Canada—it cost a brave lot of money, but the best investment ever I made, for it proved that I was ready and willing to stand by the threat I'd made. I hoisted it up in full view in the very middle of the mantelpiece to keep her in mind that I was a determined man. First along she went pale when her eye fell on the ticket, and she'd haste to agree with what I'd said over this or that. After some years she got used to it, and I'd put on me hat and coat and put the ticket in me pocket, and that brought her to her senses. But lately she'd hardly heed what I said about going abroad, whether I had the piece of paper in my hand or not."

"I've heard that the mind of a woman is slow to get at a trick, but that once she's twigged it she'll never forget."

The aggrieved husband spoke quickly. "Trick—it wasn't a trick. I always meant to go if she wasn't careful, I've been meaning to go all these years, and here I am setting off now with all that I value of my clouts, and a few things beside, packed tight in the box that's behind, and when it comes to windy nights and short days she'll think of me and she'll be sorry, but it will be too late when I'm across the sea

squatting by camp fires singing 'em songs of the old country. There's no trick about that, is there?"

"It's a pity, too—breaking up a home because of a few stray words," said the driver, shaking his head sadly.

"She should have thought of that. She had her chance a fortnight ago to-day, when I had a mind to drink tea and she had a mind to drink cocoa. I drank the cocoa because I'm a peace-loving man, but after I'd done so I took down this ticket from the mantelpiece, and says I: 'Ann, this is the end of it; as soon as I can get packed I'm off,' I says. But she only yawned in my face, and then, losing my temper, I put the ticket in my pocket and lighted a candle and went up overstairs and began to pack, and since that night I've gone forward steady in my preparations, as you well do know."

"You've ordered me to be at your gate at half-past seven in the morning for every day in the past week, and always at evening would come a message to say the next day would suit better."

"It's a very important thing for a man to leave house and home and wife, Bob—you're not a married man, it's no use talking to you, but there's times when I could have wished she would behave differently, so that I could offer to give her another chance. Why, I was on my way down to you yesterday evening to put you off for another morning, but when I got to the garden gate, she called to say I was to take the door-key, because she was going out, and that finished me. I went in and began to strap my box, and here I am started, for she knows that I hate to come back to a empty house and let myself in with a key. Yes, that finished her, boy, and here I am beginning my journey with money and gear and everything but a good heart."

The pony cart drew up at the railway station, and the two men between them lifted down the battered trunk that had

been Simon's from the time when he first went out into service.

"What about your train ticket? Best haste to get it," said the driver energetically.

"There's no need to rush and hurry," said Simon.

"When is next train for Liverpool?" demanded the driver of a porter.

"Leaves in ten minutes," said the porter.

"You'll just have time, Simon, boy," said the driver.

"Much as ever," said Simon, standing awkwardly in the rush of those who came and went to the train.

"Come on, give me the money, I'll get it," cried the driver, and at that Simon moved uncertainly toward the booking-office.

He made his request in a voice so feeble that the booking clerk repeated sharply: "Liverpool?"

Simon nodded, and the driver congratulated himself upon having such first-hand knowledge of the drama.

"It cost me pounds," said the old man, looking at the tiny ticket.

"Yes, but it will carry you a great distance," said the driver, looking at the extended ticket, "and you best come on quick, or the train will be off without you."

There was some difficulty in persuading a porter to put Simon's trunk in the carriage instead of in the luggage van. There was still a little time to wait; the two old men talked at the carriage door, one dully, speaking of everything as being past, as though he were condemned to execution, the other briskly, having in his mind the sensation he would cause when he told the story to his cronies in the public-house.

A porter slammed the carriage door, the guard strutted importantly, green flag in hand.

" Good-bye and good luck to you out there in furrin parts," shouted the driver.

At these words Simon convulsively threw open the carriage door, and ignoring a loud-voiced porter and the protesting guard, he clattered his trunk to the platform and sat on it triumphantly as the train moved gradually from the station.

" What's that for ? " said the driver, in the injured tone of a man who has been cheated of a sensation.

Simon was mopping his head. " Another jiff and it would have been too late, boy," said he. " I never paid you for carting me in."

" No more you did; but it's no odds; I'd give you that and welcome for a bit of a send-off like," said the driver, hastening away to inquire when the next train left for Liverpool.

He came back looking disappointed. " There's no other this forenoon; but a good one goes later on—what they call a through train. I spoke to the head master and told him all about you, and he said you could leave your box in his office; he was proper interested, and he wanted to know if you had your ticket for the sea voyage, and I said no, because that one you showed me is out-of-date."

" Let him mind his own business," said Simon darkly.

" Well, I must be off now, Simon," said the driver, going toward his patient pony.

" What's the haste, boy ? I'll tell you what. It's not every day that a man steps from his native country for good and all; let's make a spree of it; let's me and you go up to ' The Seven Stars ' and have a little jollification till my time comes."

The driver refused, but, being pressed, he succumbed to temptation, and Simon, insisting that he would again be driven to the station when his train was due, had his trunk

once more hoisted into the back of the cart. The pony was then stabled at "The Seven Stars"; the two men went into the bar, and the hours passed pleasantly with them, and their speech became irregular, and they spoke frankly each one to the other.

"If I'd a been your missis, I'd have bundled you out seventy years ago," said the driver, squinting horribly at Simon; "for I've heard tell that there's none so tiresome as a old miser that's cheated a young woman into mating with him."

"No such thing. Ann is ten years younger than me to a day, and that's proper, because it gives 'em respect," said Simon, spilling his beer in an attempt to look manly.

"A nice one you to respect," sneered the driver. "A man that takes a fortnight to pack a few old shirts! Seems to me that you don't mean to go at all, that you're making a fool of your missis and of me and everybody else. I've heard tell of your kind, a snake with his eye in his own tail trying to journey forth."

After this, their metaphors became so mixed that the landlord remonstrated with them, and they sat sulkily till it was time to set out for the station again.

They were just turning into the station yard when Simon threw his arms about his scandalised companion's neck. "It's no good; I can't do it, boy," said he thickly; "you've unmanned me by your kind talk, and I begin to see things a bit more clearly—I've a mind to give my Ann another chance."

The driver tried to pull his passenger from the trap, and failed, for Simon was a heavy man. "You've made a proper stupid of me," said he, climbing sulkily into his seat again; "and if our weights was equal, I'd scruff you into the train for sure."

They drove the five miles back to the village without speaking to one another, though the driver kept up a running commentary to his pony of things he had heard in the village to the detriment of elderly husbands. He had intended to drop his passenger at his gate and drive off at once, but after he had helped to hoist out the trunk and given change for Simon's reluctantly tendered payment, he saw the blind drawn aside from the lighted window of the cottage and a woman's indignant face peering out, and he stayed to see the end of the drama.

The front door was opened sufficiently to send a warm glow of light down the garden path against which Simon and his trunk were plainly silhouetted, and a woman's voice rang out sharply: "I've been expecting you these hours, Simon; how come you to be so late?"

"I missed the train, Ann, but I've a-got my train ticket to Liverpool all right; and, all being well, I'll use him to-morrow and . . ."

The woman's voice was raised. "Ticket—I'm not going to have any more ticket games—either throw 'em away or stay outside."

The door was slammed shut. Twenty seconds passed; then the two pieces of paper fluttered from Simon's hand and he said feebly; "I've heaved 'em away, Ann."

The door was opened; the old man and his trunk disappeared into the light, and all was darkness and quiet. Then the driver crept tip-toe into the garden to pick up the dimly seen tickets. "They'll be curios," he chuckled, "for I've heard tell that a bit of evidence do make a yarn go all the better."

He drove briskly to the public-house to tell the tale while it was still fresh in his memory.

D. H. LAWRENCE

The Witch À La Mode

When Bernard Coutts alighted at East Croydon he knew he was tempting Providence.

"I may just as well," he said to himself, "stay the night here, where I am used to the place, as go to London. I can't get to Connie's forlorn spot to-night, and I'm tired to death, so why shouldn't I do what is easiest?"

He gave his luggage to a porter.

Again, as he faced the approaching tram-car: "I don't see why I shouldn't go down to Purley. I shall just be in time for tea."

Each of these concessions to his desires he made against his conscience. But beneath his sense of shame his spirit exulted.

It was an evening of March. In the dark hollow below Crown Hill the buildings accumulated, bearing the black bulk of the church tower up into the rolling and smoking sunset.

"I know it so well," he thought. "And love it," he confessed secretly in his heart.

The car ran on familiarly. The young man listened for the swish, watched for the striking of the blue splash over-

head, at the bracket. The sudden fervour of the spark, splashed out of the mere wire, pleased him.

"Where does it come from?" he asked himself, and a spark struck bright again. He smiled a little, roused.

The day was dying out. One by one the arc-lamps fluttered or leaped alight, the strand of copper overhead glistened against the dark sky that now was deepening to the colour of monkshood. The tram-car dipped as it ran, seeming to exult. As it came clear of the houses, the young man, looking west, saw the evening star advance, a bright thing approaching from a long way off, as if it had been bathing in the surf of the daylight and now was walking shorewards to the night. He greeted the naked star with a bow of the head, his heart surging as the car leaped.

"It seems to be greeting me across the sky—the star," he said, amused by his own vanity.

Above the colouring of the afterglow the blade of the new moon hung sharp and keen. Something recoiled in him.

"It is like a knife to be used at a sacrifice," he said to himself. Then, secretly: "I wonder for whom?"

He refused to answer this question, but he had the sense of Constance, his betrothed, waiting for him in the Vicarage in the north. He closed his eyes.

Soon the car was running full-tilt from the shadow to the fume of yellow light at the terminus, where shop on shop and lamp beyond lamp heaped golden fire on the floor of the blue night. The car, like an eager dog, ran in home, sniffing with pleasure the fume of lights.

Coutts flung away uphill. He had forgotten he was tired. From the distance he could distinguish the house, by the broad white cloths of alyssome flowers that hung down the garden walls. He ran up the steep path to the door, smelling the hyacinths in the dark, watching for the pale fluttering of

daffodils and the steadier show of white crocuses on the grassy banks.

Mrs. Braithwaite herself opened the door to him.

"There!" she exclaimed. "I expected you. I had your card saying you would cross from Dieppe to-day. You wouldn't make up your mind to come here, not till the last minute, would you? No—that's what I expected. You know where to put your things: I don't think we've altered anything in the last year."

Mrs. Braithwaite chattered on, laughing all the time. She was a young widow, whose husband had been dead two years. Of medium height, sanguine in complexion and temper, there was a rich, oily glisten in her skin and in her black hair, suggesting the flesh of a nut. She was dressed for the evening in a long gown of soft, mole-coloured satin.

"Of course, I'm delighted you've come," she said at last, lapsing into conventional politeness, and then, seeing his eyes, she began to laugh at her attempt at formality.

She let Coutts into a small, very warm room that had a dark, foreign sheen, owing to the black of the curtains and hangings covered thick with glistening Indian embroidery, and to the sleekness of some Indian ware. A rosy old gentleman, with exquisite white hair and side-whiskers, got up shakily and stretched out his hand. His cordial expression of welcome was rendered strange by a puzzled, wondering look of old age, and by a certain stiffness of his countenance, which now would only render a few expressions. He wrung the new-comer's hand heartily, his manner contrasting pathetically with his bowed and trembling form.

"Oh, why—why, yes, it's Mr. Coutts! H'm—ay. Well, and how are you—h'm? Sit down, sit down." The old man rose again, bowing, waving the young man into a chair. "Ay! well, and how are you? . . . What? Have

some tea—come on, come along; here's the tray. Laura, ring for fresh tea for Mr. Coutts. But I will do it." He suddenly remembered his old gallantry, forgot his age and uncertainty. Fumbling, he rose to go to the bell-pull.

"It's done, Pater—the tea will be in in a minute," said his daughter, in high, distinct tones.

Mr. Cleveland sank with relief into his chair.

"You know, I'm beginning to be troubled with rheumatism," he explained in confidential tones.

Mrs. Braithwaite glanced at the young man and smiled. The old gentleman babbled and chattered. He had no knowledge of his guest beyond the fact of his presence: Coutts might have been any other young man, for all his host was aware.

"You didn't tell us you were going away. Why didn't you?" asked Laura, in her distinct tones, between laughing and reproach.

Coutts looked at her ironically, so that she fidgeted with some crumbs on the cloth.

"I don't know," he said. "Why do we do things?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Why do we? Because we want to, I suppose," and she ended again with a little run of laughter. Things were so amusing, and she was so healthy.

"Why *do* we do things, Pater?" she suddenly asked in a loud voice, glancing with a little chuckle of laughter at Coutts.

"Ay—why do we do things? What things?" said the old man, beginning to laugh with his daughter.

"Why, any of the things that we do."

"Eh? Oh!" The old man was illuminated, and delighted. "Well, now, that's a difficult question. I remember, when I was a little younger, we used to discuss Free

Will—got very hot about it . . ." He laughed, and Laura laughed, then said, in a high voice :

" Oh ! Free Will ! We shall really think you're *passé*, if you revive that, Pater."

Mr. Cleveland looked puzzled for a moment. Then, as if answering a conundrum, he repeated :

" Why do we do things ? Now, why *do* we do things ? I suppose," he said, in all good faith, " it's because we can't help it—eh ? What ? "

Laura laughed. Coutts showed his teeth in a smile.

" That's what I think, Pater," she said, loudly.

" And are you still engaged to your Constance ? " she asked of Coutts, with a touch of mockery this time.

Coutts nodded.

" And how is she ? " asked the widow.

" I believe she is very well—unless my delay has upset her," said Coutts, his tongue between his teeth. It hurt him to give pain to his fiancée, and yet he did it wilfully.

" Do you know, she always reminds me of a Bunbury—I call her your Miss Bunbury," Laura laughed.

Coutts did not answer.

" We missed you *so* much when you first went away," Laura began, re-establishing the proprieties.

" Thank you," he said.

She began to laugh wickedly.

" Oh, Friday evenings," she said, adding quickly : " Oh, and this is Friday evening, and Winifred is coming just as she used to—how long ago ?—ten months ? "

" Ten months," Coutts corroborated.

" Did you quarrel with Winifred ? " she asked suddenly.

" Winifred never quarrels," he answered.

" I don't believe she does. Then why *did* you go away ? You are such a puzzle to me, you know—and

I shall never rest till I have had it out of you. Do you mind ? "

" I like it," he said, quietly, flashing a laugh at her.

She laughed, then settled herself in a dignified, serious way.

" No, I can't make you out at all—nor can I Winifred. You *are* a pair ! But it's you who are the real wonder. When are you going to be married ? "

" I don't know.—When I am sufficiently well off."

" I *asked* Winifred to come to-night," Laura confessed.

The eyes of the man and woman met.

" Why is she so ironic to me ?—does she really like me ? " Coutts asked of himself. But Laura looked too bonny and jolly to be fretted by love.

" And Winifred won't tell me a word," she said.

" There is nothing to tell," he replied.

Laura looked at him closely for a few moments. Then she rose and left the room.

Presently there arrived a German lady with whom Coutts was slightly acquainted. At about half-past seven came Winifred Varley. Coutts heard the courtly old gentleman welcoming her in the hall, heard her low voice in answer. When she entered, and saw him, he knew it was a shock to her, though she hid it as well as she could. He suffered, too. After hesitating for a second in the doorway, she came forward, shook hands without speaking, only looking at him with rather frightened blue eyes. She was of medium height, sturdy in build. Her face was white and impassive, without the least trace of a smile. She was a blonde of twenty-eight, dressed in a white gown just short enough not to touch the ground. Her throat was solid and strong, her arms heavy and white and beautiful, her blue eyes heavy with unacknowledged passion. When she had turned away

from Coutts, she flushed vividly. He could see the pink in her arms and throat, and he flushed in answer.

"That blush would hurt her," he said to himself, wincing.

"I did not expect to see you," she said, with a reedy *timbre* of voice, as if her throat were half-closed. It made his nerves tingle.

"No—nor I you. At least . . ." He ended indefinitely.

"You have come down from Yorkshire?" she asked. Apparently she was cold and self-possessed. Yorkshire meant the Rectory where his fiancée lived: he felt the sting of sarcasm.

"No," he answered. "I am on my way there."

There was a moment's pause. Unable to resolve the situation, she turned abruptly to her hostess.

"Shall we play, then?"

They adjourned to the drawing-room. It was a large room upholstered in dull yellow. The chimney-piece took Coutts' attention. He knew it perfectly well, but this evening it had a new, lustrous fascination. Over the mellow marble of the mantel rose an immense mirror, very translucent and deep, like deep grey water. Before this mirror, shining white as moons on a soft grey sky, was a pair of statues in alabaster, two feet high. Both were nude figures. They glistened under the side lamps, rose clean and distinct from their pedestals. The Venus leaned slightly forward, as if anticipating someone's coming. Her attitude of suspense made the young man stiffen. He could see the clean suavity of her shoulders and waist reflected white on the deep mirror. She shone, catching, as she leaned forward, the glow of the lamp on her lustrous marble loins.

Laura played Brahms; the delicate, winsome German lady played Chopin; Winifred played on her violin a Grieg sonata, to Laura's accompaniment. After having sung twice, Coutts

listened to the music. Unable to criticise, he listened till he was intoxicated. Winifred, as she played, swayed slightly. He watched the strong forward thrust of her neck, the powerful and angry striking of her arm. He could see the outline of her figure: she wore no corsets: and he found her of resolute, independent build. Again he glanced at the Venus bending in suspense. Winifred was blonde with a solid whiteness, an isolated woman.

All the evening, little was said, save by Laura. Miss Syfurt exclaimed continually, "Oh, that is fine! You play gra-and, Miss Varley, don't you know. If I could play the violin—ah! the violin!"

It was not later than ten o'clock when Winifred and Miss Syfurt rose to go, the former to Croydon, the latter to Ewell.

"We can go by car together to West Croydon," said the Germany lady, gleefully, as if she were a child. She was a frail, excitable little woman of forty, naïve and innocent. She gazed with bright brown eyes of admiration on Coutts.

"Yes, I am glad," he answered.

He took up Winifred's violin, and the three proceeded downhill to the tram-terminus. There a car was on the point of departure. They hurried forward. Miss Syfurt mounted the step. Coutts waited for Winifred. The conductor called:

"Come along, please, if you're going."

"No," said Winifred. "I prefer to walk this stage."

"We can walk from West Croydon," said Coutts.

The conductor rang the bell.

"Aren't you coming?" cried the frail, excitable little lady, from the footboard. "Aren't you coming?—Oh!"

"I walk from West Croydon every day: I prefer to walk here, in the quiet," said Winifred.

"Aw! aren't you coming with me?" cried the little

lady, quite frightened. She stepped back, in supplication, towards the footboard. The conductor impatiently buzzed the bell. The car started forward, Miss Syfurt staggered, was caught by the conductor.

" Aw ! " she cried, holding her hand out to the two who stood on the road, and breaking almost into tears of disappointment. As the tram darted forward she clutched at her hat. In a moment she was out of sight.

Coutts stood wounded to the quick by this pain given to the frail, childlike lady.

" We may as well," said Winifred, " walk over the hill to ' The Swan.' " Her note had that intense reedy quality which always set the man on edge : it was the note of her anger, or, more often, of her tortured sense of discord. The two turned away, to climb the hill again. He carried the violin : for a long time neither spoke.

" Ah, how I hate her, how I hate her ! " he repeated in his heart. He winced repeatedly at the thought of Miss Syfurt's little cry of supplication. He was in a position where he was not himself, and he hated her for putting him there, forgetting that it was he who had come, like a moth to the candle. For half-a-mile he walked on, his head carried stiffly, his face set, his heart twisted with painful emotion. And all the time, as she plodded, head down, beside him, his blood beat with hate of her, drawn to her, repelled by her.

At last, on the high-up, naked down, they came upon those meaningless pavements that run through the grass, waiting for the houses to line them. The two were thrust up into the night above the little flowering of the lamps in the valley. In front was the daze of light from London, rising midway to the zenith, just fainter than the stars. Across the valley, on the blackness of the opposite hill, little groups of

lights like gnats seemed to be floating in the darkness. Orion was heeled over the West. Below, in a cleft in the night, the long low garland of arc lamps strung down the Brighton Road, where now and then the golden tram-cars flew low along the track, passing each other with a faint, angry sound.

"It is a year last Monday since we came over here," said Winifred, as they stopped to look about them.

"I remember—but I didn't know it was then," he said. There was a touch of hardness in his voice. "I don't remember our dates."

After a wait, she said in very low, passionate tones:

"It *is* a beautiful night."

"The moon has set, and the evening star," he answered; "both were out as I came down."

She glanced swiftly at him to see if this speech was a bit of symbolism. He was looking across the valley with a set face. Very slightly, by an inch or two, she nestled towards him.

"Yes," she said, half-stubborn, half-pleading. "But the night is a very fine one, for all that."

"Yes," he replied, unwillingly.

Thus, after months of separation, they dove-tailed into the same love and hate.

"You are staying down here?" she asked at length, in a forced voice. She never intruded a hair's-breadth on the most trifling privacy: in which she was Laura's antithesis: so that this question was almost an impertinence for her. He felt her shrink.

"Till the morning—then Yorkshire," he said cruelly.

He hated it that she could not bear outspokenness.

At that moment a train across the valley threaded the opposite darkness with its gold thread. The valley re-echoed with vague throat. The two watched the express, like a

gold-and-black snake, curve and dive seawards into the night. He turned, saw her full, fine face tilted up to him. It showed pale, distinct and firm, very near to him. He shut his eyes and shivered.

"I hate trains," he said, impulsively.

"Why?" she asked, with a curious, tender little smile that caressed, as it were, his emotion towards her.

"I don't know: they pitch one about here and there . . ."

"I thought," she said, with faint irony, "that you preferred change."

"I do like life. But now I should like to be nailed to something, if it were only a cross."

She laughed sharply, and said, with keen sarcasm:

"Is it so difficult, then, to let yourself be nailed to a cross? I thought the difficulty lay in getting free."

He ignored her sarcasm on his engagement.

"There is nothing now that matters," he said, adding quickly, to forestall her, "Of course I'm wild when dinner's late, and so on; but . . . apart from those things . . . nothing seems to matter."

She was silent.

"One goes on—remains in office, so to speak; and life's all right—only, it doesn't seem to matter."

"This does sound like complaining of trouble because you've got none," she laughed.

"Trouble . . ." he repeated. "No, I don't suppose I've got any. Vexation, which most folk call trouble; but something I really grieve about in my soul—no, nothing. I wish I had."

She laughed again sharply; but he perceived in her laughter a little keen despair.

"I find a lucky pebble. I think, 'Now I'll throw it over my left shoulder, and wish.' So I spit over my little finger,

and throw the white pebble behind me, and then, when I want to wish, I'm done. I say to myself, ' Wish,' and myself says back, ' I don't want anything.' I say again, ' Wish, you fool,' but I'm as dumb of wishes as a newt. And then, because it rather frightens me, I say in a hurry, ' A million of money.' Do *you* know what to wish for when you see the new moon ? "

She laughed quickly.

" I think so," she said. " But my wish varies."

" I wish mine did," he said, whimsically lugubrious.

She took his hand in a little impulse of love.

They walked hand-in-hand on the ridge of the down, bunches of lights shining below, the big radiance of London advancing like a wonder in front.

" You know . . ." he began, then stopped.

" I don't . . ." she ironically urged.

" Do you want to ? " he laughed.

" Yes; one is never at peace with oneself till one understands."

" Understands what ? " he asked brutally. He knew she meant that she wanted to understand the situation he and she were in.

" How to resolve the discord," she said, balking the issue. He would have liked her to say, " What you want of me."

" Your foggy weather of symbolism, as usual," he said.

" The fog is not of symbols," she replied, in her metallic voice of displeasure. " It may be symbols are candles in a fog."

" I prefer my fog without candles. I'm the fog, eh ? Then I'll blow out your candle, and you'll see me better. Your candles of speech, symbols and so forth, only lead you more wrong. I'm going to wander blind, and go by instinct,

like a moth that flies and settles on the wooden box his mate is shut up in."

"Isn't it an *ignis fatuus* you are flying after, at that rate?" she said.

"Maybe, for if I breathe outwards, in the positive movement towards you, you move off. If I draw in a vacant sigh of soulfulness, you flow nearly to my lips."

"This is a very interesting symbol," she said, with sharp sarcasm.

He hated her, truly. She hated him. Yet they held hands fast as they walked.

"We are just the same as we were a year ago," he laughed. But he hated her, for all his laughter.

When, at the "Swan and Sugar-Loaf," they mounted the car, she climbed to the top, in spite of the sharp night. They nestled side by side, shoulders caressing, and all the time that they ran under the round lamps neither spoke.

At the gate of a small house in a dark tree-lined street, both waited a moment. From her garden leaned an almond-tree whose buds, early this year, glistered in the light of the street lamp, with theatrical effect. He broke off a twig.

"I always remember this tree," he said: "how I used to feel sorry for it when it was full out, and so lively, at midnight in the lamp-light. I thought it must be tired."

"Will you come in?" she asked tenderly.

"I did get a room in town," he answered, following her.

She opened the door with her latch-key, showing him, as usual, into the drawing-room. Everything was just the same: cold in colouring, warm in appointment; ivory-coloured walls, blond, polished floor, with thick ivory-coloured rugs; three deep arm-chairs in pale amber, with large cushions; a big black piano, a violin-stand beside it; and the room very warm with a clear red fire, the brass

shining hot. Coutts, according to his habit, lit the piano-candles and lowered the blinds.

"I say," he said; "this is a variation from your line!"

He pointed to a bowl of magnificent scarlet anemones that stood on the piano.

"Why?" she asked, pausing in arranging her hair at the small mirror.

"On the *piano*!" he admonished.

"Only while the table was in use," she smiled, glancing at the litter of papers that covered her table.

"And then—*red* flowers!" he said.

"Oh, I thought they were such a fine piece of colour," she replied.

"I would have wagered you would buy freesias," he said.

"Why?" she smiled. He pleased her thus.

"Well—for their cream and gold and restrained, bruised purple, and their scent. I can't believe you bought scentless flowers!"

"What!" She went forward, bent over the flowers.

"I had not noticed," she said, smiling curiously, "that they were scentless."

She touched the velvet-black centres.

"Would you have bought them had you noticed?" he asked.

She thought for a moment, curiously.

"I don't know . . . probably I should not."

"You would never buy scentless flowers," he averred. "Any more than you'd love a man because he was handsome."

"I did not know," she smiled. She was pleased.

The housekeeper entered with a lamp, which she set on a stand.

"You will illuminate me?" he said to Winifred. It was her habit to talk to him by candle-light.

" I have thought about you—now I will look at you," she said quietly, smiling.

" I see.—To confirm your conclusions ? " he asked.

Her eyes lifted quickly in acknowledgment of his guess.

" That is so," she replied.

" Then," he said, " I'll wash my hands."

He ran upstairs. This sense of freedom, of intimacy, was very fascinating. As he washed, the little everyday action of twining his hands in the lather set him suddenly considering his other love. At her house he was always polite and formal : gentlemanly, in short. With Connie he felt the old, manly superiority; he was the knight, strong and tender, she was the beautiful maiden with a touch of God on her brow. He kissed her, he softened and selected his speech for her, he forbore from being the greater part of himself. She was his betrothed, his wife, his queen, whom he loved to idealise, and for whom he carefully modified himself. She should rule him later on—that part of him which was hers. But he loved her, too, with a pitying, tender love. He thought of her tears upon her pillow in the northern Rectory, and he bit his lip, held his breath under the strain of the situation. Vaguely he knew she would bore him. And Winifred fascinated him. He and she really played with fire. In her house, he was roused and keen. But she was not, and never could be, frank. So he was not frank, even to himself. Saying nothing, betraying nothing, immediately they were together they began the same game. Each shuddered, each, defenceless and exposed, hated the other by turns. Yet they came together again. Coutts felt a vague fear of Winifred. She was intense and unnatural—and he became unnatural and intense, beside her.

When he came downstairs she was fingering the piano from the score of " *Walkure*."

"First wash in England," he announced, looking at his hands. She laughed swiftly. Impatient herself of the slightest soil, his indifference to temporary grubbiness amused her.

He was a tall, bony man, with small hands and feet. His features were rough and rather ugly, but his smile was taking. She was always fascinated by the changes in him. His eyes, particularly, seemed quite different at times: sometimes hard, insolent, blue; sometimes dark, full of warmth and tenderness; sometimes flaring like an animal's.

He sank wearily into a chair.

"My chair," he said, as if to himself.

She bowed her head. Of compact physique, uncorsetted, her figure bowed richly to the piano. He watched the shallow concave between her shoulders, marvelling at its rich solidity. She let one arm fall loose; he looked at the shadows in the dimples of her elbows. Slowly, smiling a look of brooding affection, of acknowledgment upon him for a forgetful moment, she said:

"And what have you done lately?"

"Simply nothing," he replied quietly. "For all that these months have been so full of variety, I think they will sink out of my life: they will evaporate and leave no result: I shall forget them."

Her blue eyes were dark and heavy upon him, watching. She did not answer. He smiled faintly at her.

"And you?" he said, at length.

"With me it is different," she said quietly.

"You sit with your crystal," he laughed.

"While you tilt . . ." She hung on her ending.

He laughed, sighed, and they were quiet awhile.

"I've got such a skinful of heavy visions, they come sweating through my dreams," he said.

"Whom have you read?" She smiled.

"Meredith. Very healthy," he laughed.

She laughed quickly at being caught.

"Now have you found out all you want?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she cried with full throat.

"Well, finish, at any rate. I'm not diseased. How are you?"

"But . . . but . . ." she stumbled on doggedly. "What *do* you intend to do?"

He hardened the line of his mouth and eyes, only to retort with immediate lightness:

"Just go on."

This was their battlefield: she could not understand how he could marry: it seemed almost monstrous to her; she fought against his marriage. She looked up at him, witch-like, from under bent brows. Her eyes were dark blue and heavy. He shivered, shrank with pain. She was so cruel to that other, common, everyday part of him.

"I wonder you dare go on like it," she said.

"Why dare?" he replied. "What's the odds?"

"I don't know," she answered, in deep, bitter displeasure.

"And I don't care," he said.

"But . . ." she continued, slowly, gravely pressing the point: "you know what you intend to do."

"Marry—settle—be a good husband, good father, partner in the business; get fat, be an amiable gentleman—Q. E. F."

"Very good," she said, deep and final.

"Thank you."

"I did not congratulate you," she said.

"Ah!" His voice tailed off into sadness and self-mistrust. Meanwhile she watched him heavily. He did not mind being scrutinised: it flattered him.

"Yes, it is, or may be, very good," she began; "but *why* all this?—*why?*"

"And why not? And why?—Because I want to."

He could not leave it thus flippantly.

"You know, Winifred, we should only drive each other into insanity, you and I: become abnormal."

"Well," she said, "and even so, why the other?"

"My marriage?—I don't know. Instinct."

"One has so many instincts," she laughed bitterly.

That was a new idea to him.

She raised her arms, stretched them above her head, in a weary gesture. They were fine, strong arms. They reminded Coutts of Euripides' "Bacchae": white, round arms, long arms. The lifting of her arms lifted her breasts. She dropped suddenly as if inert, lolling her arms against the cushions.

"I really don't see why you should be," she said drearily, though always with a touch of a sneer, "why we should always be—fighting."

"Oh, yes, you do," he replied. It was a deadlock which he could not sustain. "Besides," he laughed, "it's your fault."

"Am I *so* bad?" she sneered.

"Worse," he said.

"But"—she moved irritably—"is this to the point?"

"What point?" he answered; then, smiling: "You know you only like a wild-goose chase."

"I do," she answered, plaintively. "I miss you very much. You snatch things from the Kobolds for me."

"Exactly," he said, in a biting tone. "Exactly! That's what you want me for. I am to be your crystal, your 'genius.' My length of blood and bone you don't care a rap for. Ah, yes, you like me for a crystal-glass, to see things in: to hold up to the light. I'm a blessed Lady-of-Shalott looking-glass for you."

"You talk to *me*," she said, dashing his fervour, "of my fog of symbols!"

"Ah, well, if so, 'tis your own asking."

"I did not know it." She looked at him coldly. She was angry.

"No," he said.

Again, they hated each other.

"The old ancients," he laughed, "gave the gods the suet and intestines: at least, I believe so. They ate the rest. You shouldn't be a goddess."

"I wonder, among your rectory acquaintances, you haven't learned better manners," she answered in cold contempt.

He closed his eyes, lying back in his chair, his legs sprawled towards her.

"I suppose we're civilised savages," he said sadly.

All was silent.

At last, opening his eyes again, he said: "I shall have to be going directly, Winifred; it is past eleven . . ." Then the appeal in his voice changed to laughter. "Though I know I shall be winding through all the *Addios* in 'Traviata' before you can set me travelling." He smiled gently at her, then closed his eyes once more, conscious of deep, but vague, suffering. She lay in her chair, her face averted, rosily, towards the fire. Without glancing at her he was aware of the white approach of her throat towards her breast. He seemed to perceive her with another, unknown sense that acted all over his body. She lay perfectly still and warm in the fire-glow. He was dimly aware that he suffered.

"Yes," she said at length; "if we were linked together we should only destroy each other."

He started, hearing her admit, for the first time, this point of which he was so sure.

"You should never *marry* anyone," he said.

"And you," she asked in irony, "must offer your head to harness and be bridled and driven?"

"There's the makings of quite a good, respectable trotter in me," he laughed. "Don't you see it's what I *want* to be?"

"I'm not sure," she laughed in return.

"I think so."

"Ah! well, if you think so."

They were silent for a time. The white lamp burned steadily as moonlight, the red fire like sunset: there was no stir or flicker.

"And what of you?" he asked.

She crooned a faint, tired laugh.

"If you are jetsam, as you say you are," she answered, "I am flotsam. I shall lie stranded."

"Nay," he pleaded. "When were you wrecked?"

She laughed quickly, with a sound like a tinkle of tears.

"Oh, dear, Winifred!" he cried despairingly.

She lifted her arms towards him, hiding her face between them, looking up through the white closure with dark, uncanny eyes, like an invocation. His breast lifted towards her up-tilted arms. He shuddered, shut his eyes, held himself rigid. He heard her drop her arms heavily.

"I must go," he said in a dull voice.

The rapidly-chasing quivers that ran in tremors down the front of his body and limbs made him stretch himself, stretch hard.

"Yes," she assented gravely; "you must go."

He turned to her. Again looking up darkly, from under her lowered brows, she lifted her hands like small white orchids towards him. Without knowing, he gripped her wrists with a grasp that circled his blood-red nails with white rims.

"Good-bye," he said, looking down at her.

She made a small, moaning noise in her throat, lifting her face so that it came open and near to him like a suddenly-risen flower, borne on a strong white stalk. She seemed to extend, to fill the world, to become atmosphere and all. He did not know what he was doing. He was bending forward, his mouth on hers, her arms round his neck, and his own hands, still fastened on to her wrists, almost bursting the blood under his nails with the intensity of their grip. They remained for a few moments thus, rigid. Then, weary of the strain, she relaxed. She turned her face, offered him her throat, white, hard, and rich, below the ear. Stooping still lower, so that he quivered in every fibre at the strain, he laid his mouth to the kiss. In the intense silence, he heard the deep, dull pulsing of her blood, and a minute click of a spark within the lamp.

Then he drew her from the chair up to him. She came, arms always round his neck, till at last she lay along his breast as he stood, feet planted wide, clasping her tight, his mouth on her neck. She turned suddenly to meet his full, red mouth in a kiss. He felt his moustache prick back into his lips. It was the first kiss she had genuinely given. Dazed, he was conscious of the throb of one great pulse, as if his whole body were a heart that contracted in throbs. He felt, with an intolerable ache, as if he, the heart, were setting the pulse in her, in the very night, so that everything beat from the throb of his overstrained, bursting body.

The hurt became so great it brought him out of the reeling stage to distinct consciousness. She clipped her lips, drew them away, leaving him her throat. Already she had had enough. He opened his eyes as he bent with his mouth on her neck, and was startled: there stood the objects of the room, stark: there, close below his eyes, were the half-sunk lashes of the woman, swooning on her unnatural ebb of

passion. He saw her thus, knew that she wanted no more of him than that kiss. And the heavy form of this woman hung upon him; his mouth was grown to her throat in a kiss; and, even so, as she lay in his arms, she was gradually dismissing him. His whole body ached like a swollen vein, with heavy intensity, while his heart grew dead with misery and despair. This woman gave him anguish and a cutting-short like death: to the other woman he was false. As he shivered with suffering, he opened his eyes again, and caught sight of the pure ivory of the lamp. His heart flashed with rage.

A sudden involuntary blow of his foot, and he sent the lamp-stand spinning. The lamp leaped off, fell with a smash on the fair, polished floor. Instantly a bluish hedge of flame quavered, leaped up before them. She had lightened her hold round his neck, and buried her face against his throat. The flame veered at her, blue, with a yellow tongue that licked her dress and her arm. Convulsive, she clutched him, almost strangled him, though she made no sound.

He gathered her up and bore her heavily out of the room. Slipping from her clasp, he brought his arms down her form, crushing the starting blaze of her dress. His face was singed. Staring at her, he could scarcely see her.

"I am not hurt," she cried. "But you?"

The housekeeper was coming; the flames were sinking and waving-up in the drawing-room. He broke away from Winifred, threw one of the great woollen rugs on to the flame, then stood a moment looking at the darkness.

Winifred caught at him as he passed her.

"No, no," he answered, as he fumbled for the latch. "I'm not hurt. Clumsy fool I am—clumsy fool!"

In another instant he was gone, running with burning-red hands held out blindly, down the street.

VLADIMIR SIRIN

The Passenger[1]

"Yes, life is more talented than we are," said the author, sighing and tapping the cardboard end of his cigarette on the lid of his case. "The subjects it invents sometimes! We can't beat it! Its works are untranslatable; you couldn't reproduce them. . . ."

"Copyright by the author," suggested the critic with a smile, a modest, short-sighted man with thin, restless fingers.

"The only choice for us is to cheat," the author continued, absent-mindedly throwing a match into the critic's empty glass. "We have to treat the works of life as a film-producer treats a well-known novel. He wants the maids not to be bored on a Saturday night, so he alters the novel beyond recognition, chops it up, turns it outside in, cuts endless episodes, introduces new incidents and characters of his own invention—all to get an entertaining film, evolving smoothly, punishing virtue at the beginning and vice at the end, perfectly natural in convention and, above all, provided with an unexpected climax to solve everything. That's just how we alter the themes of life in our own fashion, striving for some conventional harmony, for artistic terseness. We season

[1] Translated from the Russian by Gleb Struve.

our flavourless plagiary with our own inventions. To us, life seems to create too sweepingly and crudely; its genius is too slovenly; to please our readers, we take its free novels and snip out our neat little stories—*ad usum delphini*. Just let me tell you one example.

"I was travelling in the sleeper of an express train. I love the house-warming part of travel—the chilly sheets on the berth, the station lamps slowly filing past behind the black window-pane as one starts. I was pleased, I remember, that there was nobody in the upper berth above me. I undressed and lay on my back with my hands under my neck—and the lightness of the skimpy railway blanket was simply delicious after the puffiness of hotel quilts. After a little dreaming—I was thinking of writing a story about the life of railway-carriage cleaners—I switched off the light and soon fell asleep. Now, allow me to use a dodge very often found in just such stories as mine promises to be. Here it is—the old familiar device. *In the middle of the night I suddenly woke up*. But what follows is rather fresher stuff. I woke up and saw a leg."

"I beg your pardon?" interrupted the modest critic, leaning forward and raising his forefinger.

"I saw a leg," repeated the author. "The compartment was lighted, and the train was standing at a station. It was a man's leg, a large one, dressed in a coarse parti-coloured sock; a bluish toe-nail had made a hole in it. There it stood firmly on the ladder close to my face, and its owner, hidden by the upper-berth canopy, was just about to make the last effort to mount to his shelf. I had time to examine that leg properly, the grey-and-black checked sock, the purple V-shaped suspender at the side of the fat calf. Through the flannel of the long pants little hairs stuck out unpleasantly. Altogether, a most disgusting leg. While I looked, it strained out, moved the tenacious big toe once or twice, then pushed

off strongly and flung itself upwards. From above came grunts and sniffs—sounds which told me that the man was getting off to sleep. Then the light went out, and in a few moments the train was off.

"I don't know how to explain it to you—that leg depressed me. A soft, parti-coloured, ugly thing. And what made me uneasy was the fact that of the whole man I knew only that evil leg, and had not seen his figure or his face. His berth formed a low, dark ceiling over me; it looked lower now; it seemed to weigh down on me. Try as I might to visualise my night companion, I had that large nail sticking before my eyes all the time, its bluish mother-of-pearl gleaming through the hole in the woollen sock. It is strange, when you think of it, that such a trifle could upset me; but, then, isn't every writer a man who is upset by trifles? Be that as it may, sleep would not come. I listened—did my unknown fellow-passenger snore? I had the impression that he was not snoring, but moaning; but of course the clatter of wheels at night will make one's ears believe anything. Yet I couldn't get rid of the impression that from up there, overhead, some extraordinary sounds were coming. I sat up a little. They became more distinct. The man in the upper berth was sobbing."

"What's that?" the critic interrupted. "Sobbing? Really—excuse me—I didn't quite catch."—And dropping his hands on his knees again, and bending his head sideways, he continued to listen.

"Yes, sobbing; and sobbing terribly. It choked him; he would breathe out noisily, as if he had drunk a pint of water at a gulp; and then came rapid sobbing with his mouth shut, a horrid travesty of clucking; then again an intaking of breath, and again little sobbing gasps, but now with his mouth open, to judge by the gasping noise. And all this

against the shaky background of clattering wheels, which seemed to have become an escalator along which his sobs mounted and descended. I lay still and listened, feeling my face extremely silly in the darkness: one always feels uncomfortable when a stranger is crying. What's more, here I was, tied to him against my will by the fact that we both lay on the two berths of the same compartment, in the same train, indifferently hurrying on and on. And he would not stop—this terrible sobbing did not leave me; we both, I, the listening one below, and he, the sobbing one above, were flying sideways into the dark distances at the rate of fifty miles an hour; only a smash could break our involuntary connexion. Then he seemed to stop, but I was just falling asleep when again his sobs broke out; it even seemed as if between his sobbing gasps he was uttering words, in a voice coming deep from his lungs. Again he fell silent, just sniffing a little. I lay with closed eyes, and mentally saw his disgusting leg in its checked sock. At last I managed to fall asleep, and at half-past five in the morning the guard flung open the door and called me; sitting on my berth, bumping my head now and then against the edge of the upper berth, I began to dress. Before going out into the corridor with my suitcases, I glanced at the upper berth, but its occupant lay with his back towards me, his head covered with the blanket. In the corridor it was light; the sun had just risen, the fresh blue shadow of the train ran along the grass and the bushes, then, bending, rushed up the hills, spotting the trunks of the birches flashing past—a small elongated pond sparkled dazzlingly in the middle of a field, narrowed down and turned into a silver slit; a cottage rushed by with a quick clatter; a barrier-gate; a road lashed its tail—and again countless sun-spotted birches began flashing giddily past like a spotted fence. Besides myself, there stood in the corridor two sleepy

ladies who had hastily made themselves up, and a little old man in kid gloves and a travelling cap. I hate rising early—for me the most delightful sunrise cannot replace the hours of sweet morning dozing—so I only nodded gloomily when the old man asked me : ' Are you getting out at —— too ? '—he mentioned the large town where we were due in ten or fifteen minutes.

" Suddenly the birches dispersed; half-a-dozen cottages scattered down the hillock, and in their hurry were nearly run over by the train; then a huge crimson factory, sparkling with its windows, strode along; someone's chocolate called out to us from a ten-yard advertisement; again a factory block; window-panes; chimneys—in short, everything happened which happens as one approaches a large town. But then, to our astonishment, the train skidded convulsively and stopped at a desolate halting-place where an express train seemingly had no business to stop. I was surprised also to see some policemen standing on the platform. I lowered the window and leaned out. ' Shut the window,' said one of them politely. The people in the corridor grew uneasy. A conductor passed; I asked him what was the matter. ' There is a criminal on this train,' he replied, and explained briefly, as he passed, that a murder had been committed the day before in the town through which we had passed in the night—a man had shot his wife and her lover. The ladies gasped; the little old man shook his head. Two policemen and a little, round, rosy-cheeked detective, wearing a bowler hat and looking like a bookmaker, entered the corridor. I was asked to return to my compartment. The policemen remained in the corridor, and the detective began to go through the compartments. I showed him my passport. He slid his russety eyes over me and gave me back my papers. We were standing in the narrow compartment; on the upper

berth lay a dark, motionless, wrapped-up figure. 'You can go out,' the detective told me, stretching his hand towards the upper berth. 'Your papers, please.' The figure in the blanket was snoring. Standing by the open door I listened to that snoring, and the whistling echoes of that nocturnal sobbing seemed to be still lingering in it. 'Wake up, please,' said the detective a little louder, and with a professional gesture tore at the edge of the blanket, close to the sleeping man's neck. He stirred, but went on snoring. The detective shook him by the shoulder. I felt uneasy, turned away and began looking out of the corridor window, but saw nothing, my whole being intent on what was happening in the compartment.

"And imagine—I heard nothing out of the ordinary. The man on the upper berth grumbled sleepily, the detective asked in a clear voice for his documents, thanked him in the same clear voice, went out of the compartment and entered the next. That's all. Yet how glorious it would have been, it seemed—from the writer's point of view, of course—if the sobbing passenger with evil feet had turned out to be a murderer, how excellently one could have explained his night tears—and, above all, how splendidly it would all have fitted into the frame of my night journey, into the frame of a short story. But here apparently the author's idea, life's idea, was, now as always, a hundred times more glorious."

The author sighed and was silent, sucking the wet, chewed stub of his long-dead cigarette. The critic looked at him with kindly eyes.

"Now admit," the author went on after a silence, "you were sure, from the moment I mentioned the policemen at the little station, that my sobbing fellow-passenger was the murderer?"

"I know your manner," said the critic, laying a finger-tip

on the other's shoulder, and at once, with a characteristic gesture, withdrawing his hand. "If you had been writing a detective story, you would make your villain not the person whom none of your characters suspects, but the one whom everybody suspects from the first; and so you would cheat the experienced reader who is used to there being some snag. I know you're fond of giving the impression of unexpectedness by a very natural climax. But don't overdo it. There are lots of accidental things in life, but also lots of extraordinary ones. Literature has the privilege of creating the extraordinary out of an accident, of making the extraordinary unaccidental. Out of that episode, out of these accidents, you could have made a perfectly complete story, if you had turned your fellow-passenger into a murderer."

Again the author sighed.

"Yes, yes, I thought of that. I would have added a few details. I would have alluded to the murderer's passionate love for his wife. One can invent a lot of things. But the pity is that we don't know—perhaps life meant something quite different, something much more subtle and profound. The pity is that I never learned why my fellow-passenger cried, nor shall I ever find out. . . ."

"I side with literature," said the critic softly. "You, the writer, would have at least invented a striking solution. Maybe your hero was crying because he had lost his wallet at the station. I used to know a man—a grown-up man of very bellicose appearance—who cried like a baby when he had a toothache. No, no, thanks, don't pour me any more—enough, quite enough."

ORGILL MACKENZIE

The Devoted Couple

THERE the valley is broad. Northward it tightens to squeeze between high hills; southward it widens till it loses itself in the level lands about the Solway. Not only the river flows to the sea, but the very land—in fine, resignation. The road goes looping over the crumpled earth in ever gentler dips and rises, in ever easier curves; and the peaked hills drop down to humped moors, and at last to meek pastures. And there is incredible peace upon the land.

When Dan Cruden first saw it he said, "Anybody could be happy here." And his wife Grace, who saw with his eyes and set her life by his heart-beats, said fervently, "Anybody." They were wrong, but they never came to know their error—for *they* were happy there, with a kind of deathly happiness. Their love held them in, fixed and incapable of growth, and the world could have gone to damnation without rousing in them more than a remote pity.

Three springtimes I saw them before I came to know them. They often passed me when I was coming—fish snug in my basket—from that pool in the river below their house. With anybody else in the valley that would have amounted to an introduction, for folks there are friendly. You would

have thought they might have been led by my look of contentment to ask, as so many have asked me on that road, "What luck to-day?" But they never so much as looked at me till I thrust myself upon them. "The most devoted couple," I was told by the innkeeper who had, at that season of the year, and indeed at most seasons, time to be communicative. And the minister's wife, on whom, for my sins, I have to call every year, or endure the coy shaking of her finger when we meet—the minister's wife takes them as a text for conjugal bliss. "The *sweetest* couple!" she says and keeps on saying. "It restores one's faith in humanity to see two people so in love after . . . it must be twenty years."

I wanted to see these devoted Crudens, to see them from close quarters and find if I could their secret. Besides, I was piqued that they would not even say good-day to me. I believe in talking to people, in railway carriages, in hotels, in country lanes. I like leaning over a gate talking to cottagers while they dig their gardens. The wisdom I've got in these ways! And the pleasure! But the Crudens were difficult.

I met them one day at the top of Millfire. Not one human being had I seen for hours. They must have recognised me. Even if not, they must at least have *seen* me; but as I climbed the last slope of the mountain they paid no heed. They made a ghost of me. I would not have it. I shouted something stupid about the view—stupid because the view spoke for itself, and anybody who had climbed up there knew all about what that wedge of valley had to show of crinkled hills and flashes of water and vivid green where treacherous "lanes" cut through the loveliest colours the world can show anywhere.

They looked at me. After a moment they smiled, quite pleasantly, but with no giving out of themselves whatever.

He answered, "Very fine indeed." And they turned to their gazing again. Her hand was on his arm—a silly thing on a mountain-top, where, if anywhere, a man stands on his own feet—and a woman too, for that matter. I did not exist when they turned from me, and—I know it was silly—I was angry. I felt that I stood for the world they shut out, the world they had no right to shut out.

After that I was determined to get to know them, and one day when thick rain caught me coatless I made that an excuse, though it was none, for I was only two miles from the inn, and rain has never yet hurt me, and I went to their door to ask for shelter. To the maid who came at my knocking I put my request humbly. Might I stand in the porch till the rain passed? And I guaranteed its quick passing. She was a Galloway girl and weather-wise; she shook her head. "It's on for the day," she said, and her tone left the sun no loop-hole. "You can wait there and welcome, though." She hesitated, obviously wanting to offer me warmer hospitality, but unable, on her own initiative, to invite me to more. When she went in she left the door ajar. That was the best she could do.

Not so good, I thought; but chance favoured me. I was looking out over the moor, marvelling how quickly the hills had vanished beyond the thick fine rain that blew like clouds of dust down the valley, when a voice sounded behind me and bade me enter. It was Cruden.

"Katie should have brought you in. They have no natural hospitality," he said vaguely, sweeping away the whole class to which Katie belonged.

I thought of the door left open with such delicate consideration. I knew that it was *his* hospitality that the girl had doubted. He annoyed me, this egoist with his "they." But I was curious, and I went in.

"You're Mr. Cruden, I think?"

"Yes." His tone hinted that he would have preferred my visit to be less personal than I chose to make it. But I went on, told him my name, said I was staying at the "Craven Arms," and was proceeding to claim the minister and his wife as mutual friends when he cut me short. "Come in," he said.

The room was delightful, cosy and yet bare-looking. Everything in it had space to be itself. It was generously windowed south and west in a curving wall. I could imagine the sun walking round it. I could imagine how, from this eminence, looking out in clear weather, these people must feel that they possessed the valley. I said as much to the pretty woman who rose from her seat in the window to greet me while her husband mumbled an explanation of my presence that sounded like an apology for it. Her smile of politeness eased to something friendlier at my words. The very room seemed to change. It was as if I, while I stood there, had passed from a waiting-room into a living-room.

Cruden became expansive. "Nearly twenty years it is since we first saw this valley. It was a March day, everything bright and windy. We'll never forget those blues and yellows, will we, Grace?" And she smiled at him. "I remember standing down there at the bend of the road and saying 'Anybody could be happy here,' and my wife said, 'Anybody,' and we've proved it—at least for ourselves. We bought the land that very week, and by the next spring we were settled here."

"You're lucky," I ventured to say. "Very few people can live where they choose."

It was an impertinent remark—impertinent in intention, I mean. My curiosity was shameless. I wanted to know whether he was a wealthy man who chose to live here thus

simply, or one of moderate means who spent to the limit of them.

He found no fault with my words. He answered. He enjoyed answering. " Yes, but most people with my amount of luck would have stayed working in the city and played with the idea of coming here to end their days. It's no use then. People who stay in the city get set in city ways, forget how to walk. Now, my wife and I have been on foot over every firm inch of this countryside. I'll show you."

He brought from a pigeon-hole of the desk a tattered road-map. Very carefully he unfolded it; it would not stand much handling more. He spread it out on the floor. He was like a schoolboy with a favourite toy, and I marvelled to see him. I had thought him unapproachable, and here he was on his knees, his pointing finger flying over the tracks his feet had followed, his voice spilling over with eagerness. I realised that but for my chance remark on their possessing the valley, he would never have set about showing me that they did possess it. We should have been sitting on chairs talking stiffly about the weather of to-day and yesterday and last week and last year, and our boldest effort would have been the prediction of to-morrow's.

The map was red, with a fine net-work of inkings of the walks they had made, and I thought idiotically, " That's his life-blood. That's the mark he has made on the world—a holiday life."

I did not need to talk. I exclaimed, and he was content. I was left free to go on with my thoughts. Well, his was one way of living, and he had so obviously enjoyed it, was enjoying it now; and if he lived he would go on enjoying it when his feet were far past the age of walking, as long as his eyes could see the marks of red ink on tattered paper.

But, for myself, I prayed God I'd have a bit more to show by the time I was his age. I came back to his voice.

" Twenty years," he was saying, " seven thousand days, different weathers and seasons, no day quite like another, but hardly a shadow on one."

That sounded terrifying to me, that host of happy days. Not that I would go out of my way to find unhappiness—in fact I'd, like everybody else, go out of my way to avoid it, but in the end I'd be ashamed to have a flat life like that. I'd feel that I'd missed life altogether. I had to say something. I took the first thing that came into my head—and it happened to be another release for his . . . mania is the only word I can think of. And that's harsh, and it's ironic; he prided himself so on his sanity. What I said was, " This house has a newness about it. I shouldn't have said it was twenty years old."

He glowed with pleasure. He leapt joyfully on the words.

" No," he said, " the house has kept young. It's not a blatant newness : it's youth. We've kept young too, haven't we, Grace ? " His smile was like a public declaration of love from which I turned my eyes—and saw her answering smile.

Mine was not the only embarrassment in the room. There came from behind me the sound of savage poking at a fire.

" Good gracious, Margery, how quiet you've been ! I had forgotten you were there. My daughter, Mr. Craig."

The most extraordinary woman's face I have ever seen turned from the fire towards me. Margery Cruden bowed unsmilingly. I knew she must be about eighteen, but I could not have guessed her age. Young enough her face looked from its smoothness and lack of sophistication, but old with some heavy wisdom. Her bright red hair looked like graven metal helmeting her brow and ears. She was of

a shining whiteness, as notably sheltered-looking as her mother was weather-beaten. Her eyes, vividly blue, tilted slightly towards her temples. It was a beautiful face in spite of its sulky mouth and too heavy chin. She astonished me; for months after she was to haunt me. There was something about her that I could not understand.

Throughout my visit she was silent. After that noisy poking of the fire that had needed no such attention to make it burn, she returned to her seat that had so well hidden her from our sight and caught her away from her mother's recollection. It was a high-backed settle, deeply cushioned, enclosing a right angle, full of drowsy comfort, I imagined, about the fire. A book lay tumbled on the cushions where she had dropped it when she jumped up in protest against that proud claim of youth for the house and for her parents. I think I guessed then what I later came to know for certain—that youth had missed her, that age, for all her gravity, could not yet receive her, and she was left in a no-man's-land where life hardly touched her. She picked up her book. She was withdrawn from us, but not we from her. We were her enemies. There was a wrongness somewhere in this family that protested its happiness, and I knew that not everybody could be happy here, holding the valley.

I had tea with them, and then, though the rain still blew as thickly past the windows, I could not with decency longer delay my going.

Cruden gave me a coat. I took it gratefully. It was my return ticket. I had to come back. I had to find out why Margery Cruden's eyes were so at odds with her mouth.

Cruden did his best to rob me of the pleasure of anticipating another visit. "Send the coat back by the carrier sometime. There is no hurry."

But stubbornly I came, and stubbornly insisted on saying

my thanks in person. It was no use. This time, though I was admitted to their room with no preliminary wait on the doorstep, I was kept, so far as their welcome went, all the time in the waiting-room.

The room was, apart from their lack of friendliness, as if I had never left it. The rain was blowing in just such gusty clouds past the window. Mr. and Mrs. Cruden were seated in the window alcove before little tables on which were spread patience cards. They sat side by side like two children solemnly working at school desks. They looked up each with the same look of aggrieved protestation against interference. And Margery sat humped among the cushions of the fireside seat with a book and nodded greeting.

I spoke my thanks. Cold reception made them stilted as a set speech. They listened politely, but their eyes were vague. Five minutes later I was climbing down the steep little steps to the road, humiliated and angry.

My next meeting was very successful. This time there was no rain, but such sun as smelled of summer. I had fished up the river to the pool; my basket was heavy, and I was content to come back by the road. As I came near the Crudens' house I heard voices, and slowed my steps to make pausing for talk easier; for talk I would unless they turned their backs. I was in luck. They were busy planting things in the rough wall that bounded the road. I, too, am a rock gardener. I said good-afternoon and sailed into the thick of things. Full of garden lore I was. And their garden, I could see quite clearly, ran the mountains a close second. They were together with it as I had seen them together on the heights. And when I looked towards the house and saw Margery Cruden in a deck-chair, stooped over one of her everlasting books, I knew that she was shut out from them.

"You might like to see . . ." said Mrs. Cruden diffi-

dently, and her husband finished her thought by opening the gate to me. For half an hour I admired intelligently, and at last completely captured them by promises of seedlings of certain rarities from Tibet.

I had done well. I felt that I must go before I had exhausted my welcome. I hitched my basket up on my shoulder. The movement drew Cruden's attention to my burden.

"Have you had a good day?" he asked with mechanical politeness. He was not really a scrap interested till I laid the trout, moss and grass about them, and then they both exclaimed at their number and size and beauty.

"Do have them," I said.

Mrs. Cruden blushed. I suppose she was afraid their enthusiasm might seem to have led expectantly to my offer. I cut across her quick refusal with a pathetic tale of having no one to give them to but old Murray, the innkeeper, who had already had plenty. She looked at her husband questioningly.

"Thank you very much," he said heartily. "Margery will take them in." He lifted his voice. "Margery."

She put down her book reluctantly, and slowly got out of her chair. I gathered up the fish and went to meet her.

"If I might have a plate. You needn't dirty your fingers."

"I'll take them. I don't mind." She held out her hand for the basket, but I was stubborn.

"If you'll just get me a plate," I said firmly, and I followed her round to the back of the house and into the kitchen. Katie was out, and I was glad of it.

Margery gave me an ashet. She smiled at my careful disposal of the fish upon it, and with a kind of irritable patience seated herself on the shiny porcelain-topped table till I should have done. When I had arranged the fish to

my liking I tendered her the plate on my outstretched palms, like an offering, and she laughed at my gravity.

"They're beautiful. So beautiful I'd like to be able to catch some for myself."

"I'll teach you."

But she shook her head, angrily almost.

"No, thank you. They're too beautiful for me to kill with any pleasure."

"Rubbish! You're too wise to sentimentalise over the death of a fish."

"Yes, I was just excusing myself. I can't be bothered doing anything. But I'm getting tired of books."

"You do nothing but read?"

"Nothing," she said, and the word sounded bitter on her lips.

"Books eke out life," I prosed, "but they are a poor substitute for it. How long have you been doing nothing else?"

"Since last summer. I came home from France in June. Before that I was at school. Then I spent most of the holidays in this valley, where nothing happens but changes of the wind from a dry airt to a wet and back again. And the sun creeps north and then south again. I measure his journey against the notches of the hills. But when I've done that I've done it, and there's nothing else."

"I see."

I did see. They had no room for her, those two who were lovers still. They walked the hills and they tended their garden, and when it rained they played patience or walked over their red-inked tracks, or studied gardening books.

"You don't like gardening?"

"I hate it." But she laughed as she said it, and I was almost reassured.

"And walking on the hills, and . . . patience?"

Those were questions I should not have asked. I did it impulsively, wanting her to know my sympathy. For a moment I was afraid she was going to weep. She stared at me stilly. Her mouth quivered. I was moved to an infinite pity. I wanted to put my arms about her and comfort her. She was so strange sitting there. The creamy fleece of her coat collar was about her shining head as insistent on beauty as protective of it, as a calyx to a flower.

She seemed transfixed by the realisation of my knowledge of her loneliness. Then she recollected herself and answered lightly, "Not greatly, no."

I tried to keep her in the kitchen talking, but she would not stay. She had this in common with her father and mother—the keeping of all comers at arm's length, the sudden intimate moment, and, last, the complete withdrawal. Back in the garden I felt like a stranger to them all, and again, hurriedly, I left them.

A few days later there arrived the box of precious seedlings that I had sent home for. They did their work, those wobbly bits of green stuff. For the days that remained to me in the valley the Crudens welcomed me. Once or twice, when the lovers went tramping for the day, I walked with Margery; and they set off like youngsters, and we, who carried half their years, like two of middle age.

She would begin to talk jerkily, as one afraid to venture upon words. Once fairly launched, she talked innocently, happily, and those little breaks into complete naturalness were full of illumination for me. Then she would flutter away with pitiful guile as of a bird that would mislead one from its nest, and like a bird she betrayed the fact that there was a secret to be kept.

It was clear that she was jealous of her parents' love for

one another. All her life they had shut her out. She had made no friends at school. I got a picture of her coming back at the end of each term, a little older, a little changed, hoping by the worth of new achievements to be of worth to them. And always she was an invader. I saw her blunting herself against their impregnable one-ness, and going back to school more aloof, more incapable of making the friends who could have saved her. She would not yet give up hope of turning them to her.

And she irked them. Anybody could have seen that. They were affectionate, benevolent, indulgent. She could do as she liked. But she didn't want to do as she liked. She wanted them to forbid and command and possess, no matter what freedom might so be withheld from her. They did not care enough to withhold any. Again and again they forgot her, as they had forgotten on that first day when she clattered herself back to their recollection.

My holiday dragged on into June. With dreadful difficulty I at last set a term to it, and I went along one evening to say good-bye.

I cannot tell you what quietness lay upon the land. It was unearthly. All the sharp light had been sucked out of the sky, and a smooth golden glow held the earth as if caught out of time into suspense. Along that rumpled twisting road I went, and as far as my eyes could see nothing moved but the river; and the water of it even seemed entranced, seemed not to flow down, but to quiver where it stood. One constant arrow-head of ripple forked about a sunken rock; one changeless white danced at the foot of the little fall that was smooth and shining brown; and reaches of the river lay fixed in glimmer, and reaches in shadow. I felt fey. I walked up and down the road in front of their house in a kind of imprisonment from which I was released suddenly

by the sight of a shepherd and his dog. I leapt up the steps and thundered the knocker on the door so that when I went in I had to apologise.

They were astonished by my antics. I was astonished too. Fits of garrulity followed fits of uneasy silence. Once I looked up suddenly from forgetful gazing at Margery, and caught the interchanged glances of her parents. They thought I was in love with her. They smiled on me. I grew hot and ashamed. Would they welcome that as an easy way to their perfect happiness?

I stepped that night from their lighted door into gusty blackness, and the self that I had possessed so imperturbably till now seemed to blow away into the night in whirling pieces like a host of leaves plucked living from a tree. Was I in love? There was no thrill of exaltation. There was compassion and astonishment and compelled attention. I was afraid it might be love—horribly afraid.

The picture of Margery Cruden was with me as I walked. I saw the curious lively pallor of her face, the delicate pink of her mouth against the almost translucent white of her teeth, her heavy bright hair, her bended neck beautiful above the vivid dress that was as daringly green as young corn. There was, had I but known it, in the very clearness of that memory proof that I did not love her. For I have loved since, and know that the image of the beloved is the hardest of all to capture, because, seeking it, one sees more than flesh, and the mind, struggling to recall a thousand moods at once, is blurred. Now I know, but then I could not know, and that night I walked tormented.

The weather held. The sun came up next day through the smooth sky that had seen it sink. There was a swimming radiance, permanent-seeming as if ragged rain could never come again. I found Margery sitting in the garden gazing

out towards the hills with such fixity that it took the click of the gate to waken her to my coming. Her mother and father had set off early on a long tramp. Bread and cheese they had with them. It was always, she explained, bread and cheese.

"Let's go walking too."

She looked at her foolish shoes indolently and shook her head.

"Come on! The hill road to Newton Stewart! We'll rout out old Murray to take us to where the moorland road begins. And we can take a car back if you like."

"All right. I suppose I might as well." She said it ungraciously, but I was content.

She left me for a little, and came back dressed in a light skirt and sweater, and wearing sleek strong shoes. All brown her clothes were, a brown with light in it.

We got a lift to the inn, and there I stirred old Murray from his dozing on a seat before his door. He blinked at my request for a car; he was drunk with sun. But in a moment he grew brisk and trotted off, enlivened doubtless by the thought of a new item on my bill. The tattered upholstery and the broken springs of the car, the old felt hat, the hairy red neck, and the sunburnt suit of my host who drove us, reconciled me to the use of this form of transport. I hate to slip in an armchair car through wild country. I hate to have ladled out to me the stuff I ought to win by walking. But this contraption was so snorting and so protesting that I laughed with happiness.

Old Murray dropped us at the road-end, giving us a doubtful word of our prospects of seeing Newton Stewart that day.

It is a lovely road, a shepherd's road, trickling between hills that draw near and creep back—tousled hills that burn with colour through all the seasons. And the girl who

walked with me was magnificently right. Too pale perhaps, but I could not have wished the paleness of her skin weathered. She, with her brown dress and glowing hair, toned in so with this land that kept always a warmth in its moss and grasses. She had taken off her hat, and the smoothness of her hair was fluffed with separate hairs that seemed to burn with their own light. We swung along as if we could walk for ever. We were quiet with one another.

Where the hills are steep on both sides of the track we passed a lonely monument. Margery wanted to know what it was, and I told her the story I had heard, but only vaguely listened to. A shepherd boy had come somehow by education and had ended up as a professor.

"I'm surprised," she said, "that I have not heard of it. It is a wonder my mother and father haven't made a text of it. They would say he had done better to remain a shepherd and to have found a shepherdess. What do you think?"

"To-day I think he would have done better."

"But yesterday and to-morrow?"

"All the other days I am of his way of thinking."

"Then all you mean is he should have come here for holidays."

"That sounds too belittling to the hills. You know, there's something terrific about these shaggy humps of earth that have heaved up like beasts out of water. And they lie there and let shepherds and sheep walk over them, and idle people like you and busy people like me."

I smiled, but she was grave.

"And they just slough their scaly skins—rocks and grasses—and lie waiting for God knows what. I came this way one day last spring, a gurly day. The clouds were purple-grey and bulged like water-skins. And dirty grey bits had fallen on the hills. I was scared. The land seemed

to be muddled up with the sky and alive with it. I felt that it had nothing to do with me. So much was hidden by mist, and I filled the place with spirits. Chunks of the mountain stuck out of the clouds so that they looked as if they were fastened on to nothing and might drop on me."

I talked excitedly. That scene and this were so strange to think of together. And the girl beside me heightened my overwhelming sensation of life. Never before had I talked so with anybody. When I realised how my secret excitement had crept into my voice I stopped, embarrassed. My tingling mood must have communicated itself to her, for not my words could have led her to say what she did.

"I have no place anywhere. I wish I had never been born."

I have never heard such sad saying. Her voice was not bitter. It was dead.

We had come out to an opener place, and with one will we stopped. She looked over the landscape with blank eyes, and I looked at her. Her forlorn face. I did not think. I felt. I asked her, quite bluntly, if she would marry me. My words, sounding, wakened me. I realised peril and escape when she said no, she would never marry.

I have often wondered what we should have made of life together. She could never have been normal, not more than a tree that has been pollarded could come to balanced growth. I should have probed her thoughts and weighed her actions—horrible!

My rash proposal had shown me as nothing else could that I was not in love. I was alive to my finger-tips, but tremulous, humble in the face of life as I had never been before. I was set free from myself. A divine fire of immediate living burnt the thongs of restraint, and I spoke from

my heart, leaving no time for the cold interference of my head. I sat down and pulled her down beside me.

"Listen to me. I was wrong to ask you to marry me. I'm not in love with you; but I love you, and by God I'll save you. You are drowning, drowning in sticky syrup. Their little world is too small, too sweet. *They* are so small, Margery. They stopped growing twenty years ago. They found a shell that fitted, and they clamped themselves in. They can't get out. Don't wait for them. They'll never come. They've taught you that being shut in is happiness, but it's a lie. Get out and work. Be miserable without them, and you'll be happy. I tell you if they could open their shell and take you in you'd be lost. You're happier already, wishing you were dead, than you were down there in the valley reading sickly stuff and waiting for them to look at you. The prick of life has touched you. You are alive enough to wish you were dead."

The fire burnt out. My brain, making fast again the thongs of cold behaviour, dragged me back from my hot words and made me ashamed.

"You are very beautiful," I said.

Whether that was my apology or my acknowledgment of her charter of liberty, I could not tell. I was afraid to look at her. I had trampled down her boundaries. She had a right to be angry.

I need not have been afraid. When the silence had lasted so long that I was compelled to look, I saw that I had been only a voice to her, a voice speaking what she had not dared to say, an awaited voice, whose truth she knew.

She was staring out to the farthest mountains, and her eyes had the look of one who gazes out across the world and is not dismayed.

BASIL FREESTONE

The Dawn

He leant against the wall, half-crouching, half-kneeling in the darkness, hidden by the jutting gable of a house.

He heard the harsh tramp of mailed feet on the cobbles; heard the scrape of trailed pikes and the murmur of deep voices. From across the narrow streets and between the huddled houses he could see the lean towers of the cathedral standing boldly against the moon-streaked sky.

The guard marched past, their swaying lanterns peering between the cracks and the crevices of the raftered houses. François Villon pressed himself close to the wall, his ragged hose slowly soaking up the dirty water which trickled unevenly among the stones of the street.

He listened intently until the sound of the footsteps passed. The light of the lantern flickered and died behind a distant archway, and the street in Paris was silent again but for the creaking of an inn signboard and the lazy whistle of the wind.

Then, rising to his feet, he looked about him quickly. He darted into a narrow alley in which there was a wall about ten feet high. In a few seconds he had scrambled over and lay panting in the garden on the other side. The sky was filled

with heavy clouds, and the moon was drifting among them, filling their flaccid solidity with a white ethereal beauty which trembled and perished as it passed.

There was not enough light. He must wait for the dawn to help him.

As he lay among the sweet-smelling grasses and settled his legs more comfortably in the loose earth behind him, he found that his head was still swimming from the fumes of the wine.

He thought longingly of the noise and the heated atmosphere of the " Pomme-de-Pin," the shouting and the boasting, the songs of the men and the screams of the women; Robin Turgis and his wife Marguerite rushing to and fro among the company with trays loaded with bottles and mugs.

Well, they were there and he was here . . . to steal the crucifix from the Abbey de St. Germain.

He rested his chin on the palms of his hands and thoughts came in fragments as he waited. . . . He remembered he was sitting between Isabeau and Huguette with Rene de Montigny, Jehan le Loup, Little Thibault and Colin Cayeulx, who was leaning over his shoulder as he wrote :

> " Ainsi parloyent les compaignons
> Du bon maistre Françoys Villon
> Qui n'avoient vaillant deux ongnons. . . ."

Colin had leapt to his feet . . . Villon could still see his red, blotched face thrust over the table towards him. What had he said? Not worth two onions, eh? If it weren't for us, your lousy skin wouldn't be covering your bones! You can't do anything without us! You'd be dancing on air up at Montfaucon, my lad. There was a drunken brawl and a challenge. . . . Villon closed his eyes and rubbed the back of his hand across his forehead . . . or he thought

there had been a challenge, to steal the crucifix alone. As if he needed their help!

Villon rose to his feet and, crouching, began to creep towards the black outline of the abbey. The moon had sailed from behind the clouds. He could see what he was doing now.

There was a sudden clink of metal from the other side of the wall. Villon dropped to the ground. The guard was passing again.

He felt his heart thumping against the earth. That's queer, he thought drunkenly, it hadn't thumped like that before: in the grounds of the college of Navarre, the church of St. Mathurin or the Augustine monastery—and he had robbed them. Ah! he had had Guy Tabarie, Colin, Jehan and Thibault with him then; Colin, who was the prince of lock-pickers, Guy, who was so useful with a dagger. Villon felt at his belt. He had left his own dagger sticking in the bench at the inn.

He felt that his head was clearing. The bright splendour of the moon was hidden in a thick cloud-bank, and yet there was a timid light shining on the roofs of Paris. He looked towards the east. There was a white, virgin flush about the heavy brown earth; small shafts of frightened light strayed from the horizon across the dark sky. He stared at it fascinatedly. He was alone in the world; alone, watching the birth of the world, seeing the immaculate purity of its creation; he, a lascivious vagabond and a thief.

He heard a movement above his head and instinctively stiffened. His hand fled to his belt, but it was empty. Flattening himself against the ground, he looked cautiously towards the thick foliage of the tree. There on the end of a branch was a small bird, fluttering its wings and ruffling its feathers. After smoothing them with its beak, it hopped

from one foot to the other, and then, twittering excitedly, flew to another tree.

But Villon lay staring at the empty branch.

There was a clatter of a cart from the other side of the wall and the merry whistle of a carter. The world of honesty and purity was wakening . . . the pallid glory of the dawn was opening like a flower . . . beauty was lighting the sombre clouds, the beauty that he had lost in the inns and the prisons of Paris.

The murderer and the thief watched beauty coming back to life.

Presently he rose and, scaling the wall, fled like a madman away from the dawn.

JANE ENGLAND

Knight-Errant

BEYOND HIM, RIGHT across the long vlei, the sun had thrown a broad band of heavy golden light, some twenty yards wide. The rest of the vlei lay in a deep-toned shadow under the looming kopje. In the bush which he had just left doves were cooing sleepily. Their soft, throaty notes made the silence of the veld all the more intense; it was as if they defied the deep quietude that lay like a heavy hand over the world.

Jehan hunched his shoulders and muttered to himself. The distant Paravel homestead should have come into view according to his calculations. He muttered again and screwed up his eyes to look at the sun. Another hour of light yet. Another three miles he could walk before dark. He twisted one end of his long pale moustache into his mouth and chewed it reflectively, while he wondered whether it was worth walking three miles on the chance of cadging food at Paravel's. Over beyond Paravel's, where the river widened "to make room for the hippos" as he said, lay that reef which the nigger had talked about, a great big reef, shown up by a washaway after the rains; a great whopping reef, all glinting and glittering, so the nigger said. Probably he was lying; probably only rose quartz. Niggers were fools, all of 'em.

With a start he came out of that dream of a reef veined with yellow gold, and muttering about the rapid sinking of the sun, he called to his donkey and the native behind him, and started striding along the track over the vlei.

The pattering of the donkey's hooves on the baked earth was so familiar to him, that to have walked without that little pattering behind him would have been to have walked in a nightmare. He never spoke to the donkey in all his long journeyings, nor did he speak to the native, M'gumi; but for both he had a deep and sentimental affection, and could not conceive of life without them: except once in a town . . . when he had spent four riotous months there after finding the Goblin Mine, and had made arrangements for M'gumi and the donkey to board at a farm, and had not missed them at all. To be in a town was like being in another dimension to Jehan: it had no real link with the country, and in it he was not the Jehan who walked endlessly over the veld in search of gold.

The deep amber band had narrowed and become heavier, and behind the kopje the sky was a translucent blue with banners of flame waving across its surface. The shadow of the kopje was almost purple as it lay across the veld, and already there was a chill in the air.

Jehan took off his hat and let the air blow through his lank hair, and began again to reckon up the advantages of going on. He always cadged food if he could, not because he needed to, but because it gave him a rich pleasure to mulct the quiet farmers, to know they despised him for a vagabond, and yet must, by the law of the veld, give him shelter and food. But if, when he was through the dark belt of bush that lay ahead of him, just beyond the amber light of the setting sun, there was no sign of the homestead, then he would camp. Having decided that problem, he was able to let his mind become blank as it usually was when he walked. The blankness allowed

his senses to become aware of the proximity, the sweet sentimental proximity of the donkey, and of the heat or coolness of the air, the wide emptiness of the veld.

He strode on, his long thin legs moving jerkily, as if they had been attached to his body by strings.

* * *

The homestead was in the vlei beyond the bush. He saw it in light that was now quite thick, like light on a stage which is obscured by thin gauze veils let down from the flies. It was a large round hut with a conical roof, and round it, in a semicircle, four other smaller huts. There were no lights shining from it, though by now it must have been quite dark inside.

Jehan led his procession down the rocky rise from the bush to where a small river flowed with a tinkling energy between reedy banks. They stopped while the donkey drank, and then silently pushed up the farther bank. A huge red moon was thrusting the last pale radiance of the sun out of the sky, and a jackal began to yap some distance away.

Jehan came out of his reverie, and took his rifle off the pack on the donkey's back. Only two days ago at the Police Camp, where he had stayed to cadge some food and a drink, he had been told that lions were making a nuisance of themselves over at Paravel's. And, with the cool barrel of the rifle in his right hand and the small of the butt wedged neatly between his elbow and his side, he began to visualise himself as an heroic figure walking calmly through dangerous and unknown country, like that hero Jehan in the book he had read as a small boy, and whose name he had shamelessly acquired when first he left home and came to Africa twenty-five years ago.

As the monstrous moon rose in the sky the grass became more than a black outline against the track, and flowered into

a pale beauty. Jehan imagined himself back some five hundred years in time, going stealthily towards adventure. His high shoulders became hunched. The rifle in his hand was an arquebus, and in his mind lovely old French names, half remembered, swam like silver fishes between dark green weeds. He felt immensely happy and excited, utterly content in his imaginary incarnation, as he had when a boy and the scoldings and reproaches of his parents and teachers had passed unnoticed. His teacher had conclusively labelled him as slightly defective. But at home he had occasionally been wrenched out of his insecure inner existence. It was only when he came to Africa as the weedy hanger-on of Bid David that complete happiness became his. Someone had asked him brusquely what he was called. He had answered " Jehan," and immediately been suffused with an ecstatic sense of fulfilment. He was thereafter known by various substitutes for the name . . . John, Jan, Johannes . . . but each time he heard himself addressed by those misnomers he was happy, and his exquisite moments came when a stranger asked him his name and he was able to say, in an offhand manner, " Jehan ! "

The track widened slightly as he got close to the homestead, and was crossed by a broad path that ran parallel with the huts. There was a rickety fence put up, and within the fence lay a half-hearted attempt at a garden . . . some round beds edged with small stone, and growing there some tough geraniums and flowering shrubs.

A dog began to bark defiantly, as if to scare off something of which it was afraid; but presently the bark degenerated into a whimpering uncertainty.

If only these had not been round mud huts in the heart of Africa, but a stark fortress silhouetted against a smaller moon, the situation would have been completely right. He often

found it rather disconcerting when the outside world refused to mould itself according to his imagination.

He walked past the fence and into the garden, and then up to the silent huts. The dog was alternately yelping and whimpering. It came out of the porch of one of the small huts, crouching a little, its lips drawn back from its yellow teeth. In the moonlight the whites of its eyes gleamed, and there were little red streaks running across the eyeballs. Jehan thought of the wolfish, rough-coated dogs in France. He remembered a time . . .

M'gumi had halted with the donkey some yards back. Jehan went towards the open door of the hut, where a shaft of moonlight shot into the interior, and fell on a bed where two people lay . . . a man and a woman, their heads lolling, their attitudes rigid and unnatural. As he stared in, a dark streak slipped to the floor and raised a flat hammer head. Jehan slipped his rifle forward automatically and pulled the trigger.

The snake's head was blown to bits, but its body still writhed and twitched. The dog crept to the open door and whimpered there, while Jehan went right into the room and over to the bed. There was a candle on a table, and this he lit, so that the golden crocus of its light dimmed the moonlight and flung wavering shadows on the two in bed. Both of them were looking bluish, their lips curled back a little from their teeth, and they breathed stertorously. Jehan gazed at them stupidly; then he went to the door and called to M'gumi in a high cracked voice. The native left the donkey and came towards the hut. In the moonlight his shadow was short and distorted, and the blade of his assegai was like burning silver.

He came to the door of the hut and met the blank stare of Jehan's eyes; then, catching that strange tenuous thread of

thought that hung between them, a thread as delicate as that spun by a spider from leaf to leaf, he turned and went back to the donkey, which stood meekly in the flooding moonlight.

He took the donkey down past the semi-circle of huts to a stable, and put it inside. There was no sign of any native servant; the place was as still and quiet as the heart of a desert.

M'gumi felt in the pack and pulled out a bottle of whisky and a small bundle tied up in a handkerchief. Stolidly he shut the stable door and went back to the hut, and his footsteps sounded furtive on the hard red ground where a film of dust lay. When he came into the hut, he undid the bundle and produced a small, roughly-fashioned box, and as he took off the lid a dirty green ointment showed itself in the uncertain light.

Jehan picked up the woman, and the ribbon of her shift fell off a thin shoulder. He began to rub the ointment hard into the ugly little blue mark on her arm. M'gumi padded round to the other side of the bed and lifted the man, finding the mark on his wrist. He caught his breath in a sibilant way and began to rub in the ointment, pinching the arm and kneading it with the other hand.

After a time Jehan pulled the woman upright, so that her head fell forward and her straight brown hair streamed over her shoulder. He pulled her out of the bed and looked round. On a chair was a flimsy blue silk garment, sprigged with tiny scarlet flowers. He dragged it off the chair and pushed her arms into the sleeves.

She was a tall woman, and bony; but he put one arm round her and got his hand under the armpit farthest away from him. Then he began to try and rouse her. He knew that M'gumi was doing the same with the man. He thought that it was too late altogether, because the woman hung on his arm like a

sack of meal, and her head lolled from side to side like a rag doll's.

"Whisky . . . Baas?" said M'gumi.

"You're right."

He lowered the woman back on to the bed and opened the bottle. Then he thrust two fingers into the corners of her mouth, levered her teeth apart, and poured the neat spirit down her throat. Some trickled out of her mouth and made little channels down her chin, but the bulk of it went down. The muscles of her throat contracted, and she made a thick choking sound. He poured down half the bottle, and then handed it to M'gumi with his free hand. After that he pulled the woman upright once more, and he was pleased to hear her cough and feel her make convulsive movements. He dragged her to her feet, and she struggled in a faint, protesting way, but as he started across the floor of the hut her legs began to go through the action of walking.

He walked her out of the hut into the cool night. The moon was high in the sky and the light was clear and cold, and the shadows as clean-cut and jagged as black glass. Jehan began to sweat. The woman moaned faintly, and sagged, but he pulled her on; walking in sentry-go fashion twelve paces forward and twelve paces back. He saw that M'gumi was doing the same with the man.

As they walked up and down, up and down, Jehan hardly thought coherently. His mind soared away and translated the African moonlight to the cold chill of a night in France, and the woman to some unfortunate creature he had succoured. Nothing struck him as strange. When M'gumi said stolidly, "The natives . . . the servants must have run away . . . frightened in case they were blamed . . ." he took no notice. There never were servants around when he came on wretched women in lonely districts.

He felt an intense fatigue, and by and by the woman and the man became less comatose : they muttered and grumbled.

" Leave me alone," she murmured thickly, " I'm tired."

She was beginning to sweat herself out there in the chill night air. Little shining beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead, and her heavy brown hair was sticking to her head with the dampness of it.

Jehan didn't notice it : he went on walking, and she dragged along by his side, her legs trailing one after the other. In the moonlight the scarlet flowers on her blue silk wrapper had become inky black.

The dragging, exhausting promenade went on and on, while the moon wheeled lower in the sky and the shadows became less pitch-like.

By and by M'gumi grunted, and again that curious, tenuous thread of understanding swung between him and Jehan, and together they turned, pulling their charges to the hut.

Jehan let the woman sink on to the side of the bed, and as she fell back on to the pillows he picked up her feet and lifted them on to the quilt. M'gumi, like a visual echo, had done the same with the man. When they lay side by side once more, Jehan pulled the light bedclothes tidily over them and stood looking down at them.

Sweat was rolling off their faces, but they breathed steadily now. Their pallor was that of utter exhaustion. The fever and the poison were gone. They were sleeping.

Jehan straightened his back and stretched his arms until the muscles cracked. He felt deathly tired, but not at all sleepy. He wanted to eat.

" Scoff," he said to M'gumi.

* * *

M'gumi made a fire fifty yards away from the homestead, and fried salt bacon over it while the kettle boiled in the ashes.

By and by Jehan ate bacon and dough buns, and drank hot sweet coffee. The moon had gone, leaving a starless sky, but slowly a pale and dirty light crept up over the bush at the far end of the vlei. As Jehan squatted by the fire, a native in a singlet and torn khaki trousers came from between the high coarse grasses, and said humbly "*Lo Missis?*"

Jegan took no notice of him, but M'gumi explained volubly in his own language, and the native smiled and answered at length.

"Fetch the donkey," said Jehan to M'gumi.

M'gumi kicked out the ashes of the fire with his bare feet, and collected the pan and kettle. He went off by the side of the other native towards the stable. Jehan went towards the hut. All he now wanted was to get on towards the river and to his shining reef of gold. He would look in at the hut to assure himself that they were all right. When they woke they would be weak but able to manage for themselves. He would be gone, like the Jehan of old, on his wide wanderings.

Already a ray of golden light had shot into the sky. The dirty light had gone and the heaven was a deep blue. Shadows lay on the ground and there was still a little dew. He looked in the hut and saw that they were sleeping quietly. He noticed absently that the woman was handsome; her long brown hair was straight, but very thick. It rose in a heavy crest above her forehead. Her mouth was wide and petulant, and her lashes very long and dark against her pale cheeks. The man was big and very brown; his hair was dark, and fell in a thick lock to one side.

Jehan nodded solemnly and went out of the hut. A happy consciousness of romance filled him, a consciousness that slowly evaporated before the necessities of his conscious life. He saw M'gumi and the donkey coming towards the track, and went down to them.

All three started off, and Jehan was once again aware of the pattering of the little hooves, and the slow growth of the heat as the day advanced.

He would rest down by the river, he thought, sleep there until sundown and camp there. The reef should be a few miles on the other side. He wondered if there would be a safe drift, or whether they'd have to risk crocodiles. But anyway he might get a small buck before the sun got too high. His light blue eyes flickered from side to side.

Then they came to a small rise and looked down to the river. He saw it as a broad silver belt, and looking again, he saw that there were hippo, dark, ungainly forms, breaking its surface. He got an obscure pleasure in the fact that hippo were there. He had expected them, and they were there. Probably, therefore, the gold would be there too.

He walked on and saw, coming along the track, a wagon and a span of sixteen oxen. A native led the oxen, and there was a white man driving. Jehan regarded it in a detached way. A trader, he thought . . . and he had a stinking contempt for traders. But at the rate he was travelling and at the rate the wagon was travelling, and taking into consideration their respective routes, they must inevitably meet. He began to swagger slightly, and quickened his pace.

The sun was climbing up in the sky now, and the dew had gone. The vlei that swept towards the river was like a sheet of pale gold. Against it, the brown and black oxen looked like wooden toys from a Noah's ark.

When they met where the two tracks branched, Jehan saw that the driver of the wagon was a short spare man with tufted eyebrows, and small grey eyes. His mouth was wide and humorous.

" Morning," he said to Jehan, curtly.

" Morning," said Jehan in his cracked voice. " Are you going to Paravel's, by any chance ? "

" That's where I'm going," said the spare man.

Jehan waved his arm negligently.

" You'll find that they are all right," he said, " both of them safe in bed where I found them, bitten by a snake. But *I* cured them. They'll wonder who did it when they wake."

" I'll tell them," said the man amiably.

He looked at Jehan with a hard grin that stretched his mouth wide over two rows of regular teeth.

" What name shall I say ? "

" Jehan . . ."

" Mine's Paravel," said the man, and cracked his long whip. The oxen strained to the yokes and the wagon creaked on.

NORA LLOYD

Johnny Dolan

A MAN stood in the field that sloped from Murrigrane farm to the creek below, shading his eyes from the yellow light of the September sun, and looking over the eight miles of smooth sand, hugged in the arms of Brandon Bay. He was tall and loose-limbed, with the easy bearing of a man whose ancestors have owned their land for generations. His clothes were baffling. Remnants of childhood's garments were stitched into his pants, which peeped in and out of slits in his trousers, livening them up considerably. Into his navy-blue jersey were sewn coarse, knitted grey sleeves.

The bay over which he looked seemed to the eye a fine natural harbour. It was flanked on the far side by the Magharee Islands, and on the west, not far from Murrigrane, by the headland of Brandon Point. A broad estuary cut into the centre of the bay, and at its head nestled Cloghane village—a street of whitewashed cottages, a shop or two, and an ivy-covered ruin of a church, alert like a crouching cat against one of the swelling, mist-tipped mountains overlooking the village. The monarch Brandon, rising some three thousand feet from the sea, was veiled, as was his custom; though sometimes, on a sunny morning, he would seem to leap forward with a sharply outlined summit.

The road from Cloghane wound round the bay to Brandon village, keeping close to the coast. Carts, painted orange, and shaped like lidless boxes, with their drivers perched on lofty seats of hay or turf, were making their leisurely way along it. The countryside was over-populated; all the land up to the foot of the mountains was under cultivation, and divided into irregularly shaped fields of hay, potatoes and mangels.

The road crept by Brandon village, slipping inland past the back of a string of cottages huddling over the sea. Some three miles out, the brown sails of a fishing-smack broke the deep blue. The man glimpsed it and shook his head. It was no native boat, he knew, but the French sloop, which would sail to within a mile or two of the shore, filling its cage with lobster.

He turned to meet the girl who was coming from the farm towards him. She carried his billy of tea and a red sod to warm it by. Her voice rose and fell in mellow cadences:

"Will ye be comin' up to the house, Jahnny? The Patthern will be upon us and we wi' nothin' ready at all. There's the lamb still hangin' and 'tis money for stackins I must have, indade I must!"

"The Schoolmasther used to say 'twas grand to see the gurrls wi' the fine brown legs on 'em," began her brother dreamily. "He said 'twas the divil hisself who invented stackings."

"Och, for the love o' Mike, can't ye forgit the Schoolmasther and the Docthor for a while? Sure and 'twould be all the bether if ye did, for 'tis not the likes o' thim will be comin' along this year. Isn't Octhober on the heels of us? And what would they be doin' in the little tint, wi' the light dyin' early and the nights growin' cold?"

" 'Twas a grand tint," replied the man; " indade, 'twas like a hotel. Ye was niver inside of it "—turning on her with scorn. " Och, git along wi' ye, and let a man have his tay in pace."

Unseeing, he watched her as she went towards the farm, springing lightly over the stile, her brown legs gleaming below the tattered cotton skirt. He took his tea and sod of turf to the bottom of the field, where he sat down with a grunt, his back to the hedge, looking up at Murrigrane, whitewashed and thatch-roofed, the last farm on the climbing road that dwindled to a mountain track as it reached the headland.

The second crop was safely housed, and the long rectangular field and the smaller triangle, leading into the creek, looked shorn and stubbly. Mangels, he grew on his meagre stretch of land, potatoes, hay and a little oats. The fields looked bleak and barren now, compared with their richness that July fifteen months ago, when the harvesting was only beginning, and the two travellers had dropped in, one day, through the square of rusty corrugated iron that served as a gate, and sauntered down his field towards him. Looking up, he could see them again now, the two men in shorts and open, coloured shirts, bent with the heavy packs on their backs, and walking carefully in the furrow he used as a path through the mangels.

That they were strangers he could see at a glance, for they moved with a hesitating awareness foreign to the natives. He waited till he was sure they were coming down to him, and then went forward to greet them.

" Farmer Dolan ? " inquired the taller of the two.

" The vary one," said Johnny delightedly. " Did they give ye me name up beyant ? "

" We were told at Cloghane that you owned the land above

this creek. We would like to camp here, if you've no objection."

He plainly expected none, and that a few words would settle the matter, but Johnny only grasped that these were visitors, and his hospitable spirit warmed towards them. Throwing down his fork, he led the way down the field, indicating, with a wave of an arm, the extent of his domain. They crossed the stile into a smaller triangular field, at the apex of which was a low stone wall. Leaping it, they found themselves in the creek which the travellers had sighted from the other side of the bay. A perfect little beach lay before them, bordered by steep projecting rocks, where two men could be seen, rooting with iron hooks for crabs and lobster. Meanwhile, Johnny plied his guests with inquiries; he wanted to know where they came from, their ages, professions and politics. The interrogation did not take the form of direct questions, for he was a polished conversationalist, possessing a copious vocabulary and a ready anecdote. He spoke slowly and deliberately, refusing to be side-tracked or hurried, and, to the surprise of the strangers, the negotiations lasted well on into the afternoon, so many irrelevant courtesies did they exchange.

"Twanty-six, are ye?" repeated Johnny, gazing interestedly at the shorter of the two, whom he had discovered to be a medical student, "and the schoolmasther is twanty-tree, ye say. Well, now."

The sun was already low, and the mountains a misty blur in the distance, when the strangers finally made it clear to Johnny what was wanted of him. With a smile, he flung out a careless arm, indicating that the whole of his property was at their disposal. He was a striking figure as he stood there, a peasant king, unconscious of his royalty.

They chose a site at the top of the triangular field, and at

first Johnny sprawled on the ground, watching the rucksacks being unpacked. He was getting the personalities of the men clear in his mind. The shorter of the two was the elder and the leader of the expedition. He was sandy-haired, with keen blue eyes and a tight, determined mouth. He had a gruff manner, and left the talking to the other, from whom Johnny's cross-examination elicited that he had just left the university and was teaching in a preparatory school. His untidy dark hair concealed a well-shaped forehead, and his mouth was whimsical. To Johnny they became at once the Docthor and the Schoolmasther.

At last he realised that they were deliberating where to pitch camp, and sprang excitedly to his feet; he had never seen a tent. He grasped that shelter and dry ground were needed, and in his anxiety to help he prodded the ground vigorously, tore away projecting branches, tightened pegs prematurely, shifted the posts before he was satisfied with the balance of the tent, and his ecstatic journeys in and out of door and window nearly brought the canvas down on him. He always found a better spot for pitching just as the work was well under way.

" Sure, this is the vary shpot," he decided for the fifth time. "Annybody won't be botherin' ye here at all, at all. 'Tis a grand plaace."

At last it was all finished, and the little tent snuggled against the hedge, visible only to the inmates of one or two farms high up on the hill near the headland. Johnny went back to the upper field to go on with his stacking.

The next morning, the campers were up and away in the early hours, in the hope of reaching the summit of Brandon, and sighting the Dingle valley on the other side before the mist came sweeping over and blotted it out. Johnny saw two tiny figures, their bare backs gleaming in the sun, trudg-

ing up the long shoulder leading to the dark ridge above. Like his fellows, he left the mountains alone except when, perchance, he would join the pilgrims, come over from Dublin and other parts, to make the annual ascent to the sanctuary of the mariner saint. The pilgrims took the more gradual route, and there was eating and singing and all kinds of jollity. But the Docthor and the Schoolmasther . . . he frowned in perplexity as he watched that steady, monotonous progress up the steep side.

He was angry that they had chosen the long route, and disconsolate that they had evaded him; but the tent would be down there at the creek. He found it, self-sufficient little shelter, its window and door demurely studded over. He longed to pull apart the studs and creep inside, but his pride forbade him. But, at the thought that the village people might hear of it and violate it, he grew hot with rage. Either the travellers knew nothing of the pranks of village louts, or they trusted that on his land they would be safe from marauders. And so they would. His jaw was set as he walked up to the farm.

Murrigrane was a mere cottage, consisting of a large raftered room with a cobble floor and a loft above. There was no furniture except a table drawn into the wall, a dresser in the corner, and a few stools. A peat fire was burning on the open hearth and a teapot stood by it. On the wall was hung a small shrine at which candles were burning. A newly killed sheep hung just inside the doorway, and its inflated bladder, strung from the rafters, floated like a balloon. Johnny's mother, a very old lady, crouched over the fire with her wheel beside her, spinning coarse wool. Nellie was churning in the far corner. Johnny entered, and began fumbling in the drawers of the dresser.

"What ails ye?" cried Nellie. "Have ye lost somethin'?"

" Have ye a bit o' paper about ye ? "

" Is it paper ? Sure an' if I had, 'twould be lyin' round Mrs. Kelly's butther this vary minute instead o' me best cloth."

" Och, not at all ; 'tis writin'-paper I'm wantin'."

" Glory be, and who wad ye be afther writin' to, may I ask ? "

" Are ye mindful of the box o' swates as was givin' ye a year past, down Castlegrigory way ? "

" To be sure I am."

" Have ye kept it ? "

" I have."

" If ye could be sparin' me the tap off that box, I'll be buyin' ye some ribbons for the dancin' on Patthern Day."

Muttering to herself, she climbed up to the loft, and emptied the box of its contents, a few bits of ribbon, a brass ring, some pins, a dirty sugar pig, a china brooch and her silk handkerchief.

" Faith, I don't know where I'll be puttin' me little tings," she called down.

" 'Tis only the lid I'm wantin', " he answered. " Come on down now."

She gave him the lid, and watched him flatten out the corners till it looked like a picture-frame.

" There was a battle of ink I bought some time past," he began.

" 'Twas a terrible long time since, and it does be all dried up, but I have the battle put away."

They diluted the powder, and made a solution of grey flecked liquid. Johnny sat down, and leant his great arms on the table. He held down the cardboard with an earthy finger, while on its blank side he laboriously traced with an inked match, his clumsy script. Perched on the table,

Nellie watched him, and by and by the old mother crept up and looked over his shoulder. This is what he wrote :

> " Any person or persons
> found in these lands
> after this notice, will
> be severly delt with."

They all went down the fields to see the notice installed. It was fastened to a stake in the ground, and blown away that night in the storm.

Johnny spent a great part of the day in improving the field for his guests. A fresh-water stream ran down one side of it, but the cattle dirtied it where it sprang down the hill above the road. To obtain pure water, the campers would have to go over to where a spring trickled out on to the beach. Not content with this, Johnny set to work to dig a mouth for the spring further up the field. When the water supply was perfect and the hedge trimmed neatly, he made a second expedition to the house. This time he carried down a sack of turf and potatoes, and another of hay and bracken for the floor of the tent. Then he waited contentedly for the walkers to return.

When they came at last, they appeared not to notice what he had done, but spoke enthusiastically of the lights and shadows in the bay when seen from a height, and then, in a disgusted tone, of the obstinacy of Irish mists. Even as they reached the top of the shoulder and the further peak of Brandon sprang into view, little puffs of cloud oozed over the top, crept steadily down the side and merged into a thin mist. And from the summit, scurrying clouds hid all but sudden glimpses of the other bay.

" Aye, 'tis always like that," Johnny told them placidly. " What use is it to be climbin' him at all ? "

They were hungry, and pulled out the primus stove.

Johnny lay on his stomach, chewing a blade of grass, and watching the machine intently. He had heard of this kind of magic before, but never seen it in action.

"Come over here and have a look at this," called the younger man, who was fiddling with some sticks of chalk in the far corner. "I'm going to make soup on this."

He was holding a match to the bars of white stuff, laid criss-cross in a primitive little spirit stove. Johnny smiled broadly, feeling himself in safe waters.

"Och, don't be coddin' me," he cried delightedly.

Dusk was gathering when, warm and replete, they lay smoking, the farmer cupping his cigarette with his hand. The sea was grey, and little waves sucked and lapped at the shingle. The mountains were a blur and might have been huge shadows. Near them the stream trickled noisily through the rushes, and the only alien sounds were the explosive expectorations with which Johnny punctuated his smoking. The countryside was closing in and would soon engulf them in obscurity. The younger man removed his pipe.

"I'm sorry I listened to you, Dick, and agreed to the Primus. What we want now is a good red fire."

"Very good talk with your belly full. Have you ever tried to cook on a newly-made turf fire?"

"Is it a fire?" asked the farmer, clambering to his feet. "Sure, 'tis aisy enough to make."

He brought over an armful of the turf he had carried down that morning. He made a little cairn and laid more turf on it, slab by slab, making circles which widened with each layer.

"Hey!" cried Dick warningly, "you'll never get that going."

It resembled a large anthill, and broke all the traditions of the well-set wood fire. For some time after the farmer applied his match, the brown mass smouldered with a sweet-

smelling, pale grey smoke. Then in the centre red-hot sods began to glow, and finally the whole threw a dull red light into the falling dusk. Silently, Nellie crept in and joined the circle. She was wearing high-heeled satin shoes, and stretched her feet well into the firelight. Like her brother, she spat tobacco vigorously, and contributed to the conversation sporadically, with a high-pitched cackle of a laugh.

"Wish we'd brought a car," grumbled Dick. "All this splendid country to cover, and the roads to ourselves."

"Yes, and go tooting along, raising the demons of the dust and scarring the whole country," retorted the Schoolmasther. "You make me sick, you modern centaurs who can't leave your vulgar contraptions where they belong, but must desecrate virgin country with them. It's a form of conceit, of course; you want to master the country rather than listen to it. Why don't you amputate your lower half and rivet yourself permanently into your car?"

"Wish I could," puffed the other. "Don't know what you mean by listening to the country—sounds batty to me. What I do know is, that with the Morris we could see this country you're so fond of, and get round the whole of this gorgeous coast, instead of being mewed up on one peninsula."

"There's enough on this one peninsula to keep you occupied for ten holidays if you chose to see it. This lust for quantity, this desire to hack your imprint into as much ground as you can, is devilish. Wonder you don't carve your initials on every milestone you pass—but that would delay you, of course." He turned to Dolan. "You, Farmer, do you like the idea of motors pushing and snorting over your roads?"

Johnny had been listening intently, looking wonderingly from one to the other.

"Sure, a mothor does be a grand ting," he said firmly.

" Why ? "

" Sure, it does be fine gettin' to plaaces quick. By the time ye harness the old mare the marnin's gone on ye. And there do be grand shelther from the rains. Och, we're mortal backward in this counthry. 'Tis the same iverywhere in Ireland. Other paple git cars and aeroplanes, an' we niver see thim over here. There was a grand flate comin' this way, sometime since, from Italy—an Armada they called it—an' we was lookin' for days and days, an' we niver saw a sign of it."

" 'Planes too," murmured the Schoolmasther. " Noisy, dangerous, ugly 'planes."

" Have you ever seen one rising on a sunny day ? " asked Dick. " You'd like to see that, Farmer."

" I've heard tell they do be like great silver birds."

The tall young man sat up with sudden energy, and brushed back his flopping hair.

" Dolan," he shook a finger at the farmer, " you've got here a countryside so lovely and unspoilt as to be holy—a veritable Island of the Blest. Can you look at your moody sea and mountains, your golden waving corn; can you smell the salt from the sea, the sweet honeysuckle, the peat smouldering in your hearths; and tell me that you would like to have these hustling horrors he speaks of, defiling your roads with their noise and foul smells; that you would like to have people here, deflowering your shores, swarming in hordes over your fair lands, carrying with them all the paraphernalia of their degraded pastimes ? . . ." He paused for breath.

" Good effort, Sammy boy," snapped the other, grinning at Dolan.

Johnny thought the Schoolmasther a little fey, but had been listening to him with courteous attention.

" The say and the hills do be beautiful alright," he said

slowly; " but it do be powerful lonely here on cold winther nights when 'tis too dark to see annyting. 'Twould be grand to have folks here to talk to of an evenin', 'twould indade. But the likes o' thim won't be comin' till we build a proper railway for 'em, and a hotel, so I'm told."

" There's your answer, Sam," said the fair man quietly. " Well, Dolan, why don't you save those shillings you spend down on the quay, and buy yourself a motor? It would be a great achievement to be the first car owner in Brandon."

" Blast your dirty, commercial mind, Dick," growled the other, " contaminating the gentle savage with your uncivilised ideas."

Johnny looked at him perplexedly. He was acquiring a deep respect for the Docthor, that cool sane man, but the Schoolmasther puzzled him.

" Maybe I would do that very ting," he said, after a pause. " They say Jimmy Moore, down Cloghane way, is afther buyin' a car in Thralee for a matther o' ten quid—a used one, o' course. But 'twould be a long time before I had that much saved, wi' the prices as they are now, an' no biddin' in the market for cattle at all, at all."

" Well, sleep on the idea, old man. Good-night to you both, I'm turning in."

" Good-night, Johnny. We'll help you with the hay-making to-morrow," smiled the Schoolmasther.

The man leaning against the hedge shifted his position, drawing in his right leg. Very slowly Johnny Dolan pulled himself out of his daydream, shivering, for the slanting rays of the autumn sun had no heat, and the ground was damp. He got up stiffly and looked round him. What the girl said was true, October was upon them, and then cold winds would blow in from a grey sea, the evenings would shorten,

and the fields would settle down in the grip of winter. The campers would not come now, though he had his field prepared for them since June. He put his hand to his pocket and took out a little silver case. It was the pipe-lighter the Docthor had given him in parting, saying that it was a souvenir to remember them by till they returned the following year. This machine had been his pride and joy for months; he had polished it nightly, worshipping at its tiny flame. But now, it would not work, and the Docthor did not come to set it right. The men on the quay laughed at him. " Waitin' for your funny paple, Johnny," they cried when he went their way. They laughed at his delight in the little machine. They did not know that he regarded it as a link with that outer world whence he implicitly believed the travellers would come again. They laughed too, because Farmer Dolan had given up his evening stroll to O'Flanagan's pub on the quay, where the villagers took their nightcap and discussed the events of the day. They did not know that he was saving his money to buy a motor; they would have laughed all the more at that. As it was, they decided he was taken " quare."

He walked down the field and out on to the rocks that nursed the creek. In the distance he could see the curve of the big bay stretching out to the Magharees, those barren islands where nothing grew, and cattle were blown into the sea. Beyond the Stradbally range, he could just discern the majestic crests of the Macgillicuddy Reefs. A wind was blowing in from the west, hurrying on the waves till they broke into frilly wisps. The sinking sun threw a path of gold across the sea, and climbing on to an exposed rock, where the sea sucked and pulled below him, Johnny took his silver case and hurled it at the sun. It glistened for a second in falling, then cut the water with a hollow sound, leaving a circle of ripples over its grave.

He walked up to the house, through the kitchen, and up to the loft where he kept his personal belongings. When he climbed down again, something jingled in his pocket.

Down on the quay, the men were congregating for their pint, at O'Flanagan's bar. There was a shout as Dolan appeared in the doorway.

"D'ye see that, for the love o' Mike? Johnny Dolan! An' what's come to ye, Johnny, afther turnin' the cowld shouldher on the lat of us for months and months?"

"Jahnny, ye limb o' Satan," the publican hailed him, "I'll be pourin' ye out a pint."

"No pints for me," said the newcomer heavily; "bring out your whuskey, Maurice. Fill up me glass wi' good old Jameson. Give them a pint all round," he cried, flinging silver on the counter.

There was a burst of applause.

"The man's come into a fartune."

"Och, would ye look at his glum mug."

The tavern was in darkness save for a turf fire glowing redly in the corner. The men hung at the entrance, looking down to the pier where they would dance later. It was nearly dark, and the fire threw huge distorted shadows on the wall, of arms and glasses. Maurice, behind the counter, seemed like a leprechaun peeping out of a cave. He had no light, but he knew where his bottles were. Two bearded gaffers, their faces seamed with dirt, leaned over their sticks, yarning in Gaelic.

"Jahnny," called someone, "give us a sang. A sang, Jahnny."

He leapt to his feet, on fire with the spirit he had gulped down. Suddenly it seemed to him that this was his world, this mud-floored cave, the gleaming firelight, the spectre behind the counter, the dying light outside, falling on the grey-

white cottages and the dark sea beyond them. He came to the doorway.

"Lookin' for your funny paple?"

"Be damned to the funny paple," shouted Johnny Dolan, crashing his glass on to the counter. "Fill her up, man, and go aisy wi' the wather. I'll sing to ye, boys."

He took his drink over to the hearth, and they gathered round where he straddled on the table, his glass raised, the firelight flickering strangely on his ruddy face. He began to sing, and his rich, untrained baritone rose and fell, filtering through the smoke and mist, and piercing the night air that hung over the quay. When he came to the chorus, they all joined in lustily.

"Here's a health to ye, Father O'Flynn
Slainté and slainté and slainté agin.
Powerfullest praythur and tinderest taythur,
And kindliest craythur in owld Donegal."

Johnny went on alone, dropping his voice to a whisper:

"Och, Father O'Flynn, you've a wonderful way wid you.
All owld sinners are wishful to pray wid you,
All the young childer are wild for to play wid you,
You've sich a way wid you, Father avick.
Sthill, for all you're so gintle a soul,
Begad, you've your flock in the grandhest conthrol,
Checkin' the crazy ones, coaxin' onaisy ones,
Liftin' the lazy ones on wi' the stick."

The singer sprang to his feet, and threw out his arms, his gigantic shadow grotesquely swaying on the wall behind.

"Come on now, boys," and the deep male voices crashed into the rollicking chorus:

"Here's a health to ye, Father O'Flynn
Slainté and slainté and slainté agin.
Powerfullest praythur and tinderest taythur,
And kindliest craythur in owld Donegal."

The light died, the torches were brought out, and the concertina began to blow out a lively rhythm. Johnny Dolan went down with the rest to join in the dance.

CHRISTOPHER CHRISTIAN

The Picture

THE man was so tired that it was painful for him even to lift the perambulator's front wheels on to the step. He was moving mechanically, and the sudden relief, when the back wheels were up, jolted him into the concrete lobby of the Baths; he noticed vaguely how the springs creaked, and the damp of the place seemed to cling, drowning any expected scent of cleanness. He watched a dark silver drop creeping down the slimy wall; he was repelled by the atmosphere, yet he stayed, fingering the money in his pocket, watching the bead of dirty moisture as it slithered down the pitted surface. Now it overtook another, passed it, slowed up; the other approached it and the man looked on fascinated, forgetting the three coins, one and sevenpence, in his pocket. The drops spread, caressing the space between them, joined; it was like courting and marriage, he thought. He felt himself smile slightly, then looked at the perambulator. He had not troubled to push it into the corner, but stood in front of it, as if dissociated from it; they were both somewhat forlorn. Now he lost interest in the mated drops, and wheeled the pram over against the wall. A door upon his right opened out into a dark passage which led, he ex-

pected, into the women's baths. He pulled at a metal handle, and a bell clanged in the dankness.

His picture-book was almost hidden under a pile of papers. The lovely apple-red and green could hardly be distinguished in the gloom; only two letters of the words SUNDAY ANNUAL were showing, S U and a piece of N. Had he time to open it, and quickly turn the pages? Time to look for a moment at his beloved picture?

A key turned noisily in the other door at the far end of the passage. He made a movement towards it, then stopped. His ears tingled to the steps of a woman. These were uneven; he looked at the floor stubbornly, angry always that women should be old. "Not got a towel? Then it's fivepence." Slowly he raised his eyes. Again he was seized with impotent annoyance to see her boots, black and seamed, one with a patch over the toes; it was cracked, and grey lines met the clumsy stitches. Her ankles were swollen, and she had not laced the boots to the top, but tied them where the hooks began; one of them had no tongue; from the other it protruded, not hanging over the laces, but sticking tiredly forward. She wore a full skirt of rusty brown; it was torn a little; he recognised that the colour was warm in its mellow age. His eyes would not take in her heavy bosom; he fumbled for the sixpence, sought her face. It was wrinkled with smiling; grey creases lined her skin. He had not been able to guess the colour of her hair, was surprised that it should still be black. It was drawn straight down to a ragged bun; a hairpin was hanging from it. In her ears were little stones. Garnets. Like his mother's mother had worn. Her skin was brown, and he thought that perhaps she was of gipsy people too. He held out the sixpence, refusing the gay comfort of her eyes, and when she put out her hand for it, he did not move, holding the

coin between his fingers, gazing as if beyond her. As she took it, the tips of their fingers touched. He was too conscious of his broken nails, and dropped his hand, but could not hide it in his pocket; it slid behind his back. The woman's face broke into smiling fragments: "You're dead beat, ain't you? A bath'll fresh you up." She dragged at the corner of her dress. Old Katrina had worn grey-flannel petticoats too. From under the coarse stuff she fetched the heavy tap key, and the key of the bathroom door tied on to it. He wondered what it felt like hard against her thigh. The brown dress fell slowly, and he watched the folds uncoiling over her knee; her legs disgusted him. She hobbled to one of the doors and opened it, but he stammered—"No, not that one. Can't I have the middle one?" It was like a child asking, almost pleading. "Why, yes, if you like it better." He resented her lack of curiosity; the middle bathrooms had windows, and he longed for light. She opened the other door.

The plug lay on the window-sill; a grey, chewed-looking piece of string dangled over the edge. The other cubicles had that grey-green shiny wall; here there was yellow wood, clean-looking, on either side. She fitted the key over the tap, and turned it, and the water gushed out into the bath. He loved the colour of it, and the noise, longed to be alone with it. "I'll get your towel, and your change," she said. "You can turn off the tap yourself." Blast her! Why was she kind, like to a child? But she was old enough to be his mother, he thought.

The memory of his picture assailed him again, but there was not time to look at it. If the attendant had been young and beautiful, like Queen Mary in the picture, they would not have let her have the job. They always chose old women to look after the Public Baths; men, he supposed, had some

strength and desire left in them, however old they grew, but women became useless after a while. He started to take off his coat, but dared not begin to undress when a woman, even this old harridan, might see him. The buttons of his waistcoat were shiny and small, so that he could not take firm hold upon them. They made his skin feel smooth as steel, though when he rubbed his fingers on cloth, he knew they were hard and calloused. The water was creeping up the side of the bath, but it was not yet deep enough to cover him; he wanted it to be three-quarters full. He began to take off the red handkerchief at his neck; she should see his throat and the hairs upon his chest, the strength of him. He felt tired and somehow frightened. The steam from the bath struck his face as he bent over, and filled his nostrils and eyes. He staggered slightly, then stood up. He heard the old woman's key at the end of the passage. Hastily, trembling a little, he wrenched the tap round, to stop the water. That indignity he would not suffer, that she should decide he had enough; some attendants turned off the bath before it was half full. He thought greedily, it was not as deep as he wanted. He saw her come in, and looked away impatiently. "Got enough water?" she asked. He held the key out to her. He wished she would stop grinning and hurry; she was hiding the great piece of iron under her petticoat again, and telling him how much the bath would rest him. "That's it," he said absently. Under her petticoat, where the key hung, the top of her stocking writhed, not meeting her drawers. She was firm and strong-limbed once, he told himself. He felt that she was trying mutely to tell it him herself, and was the angrier that she was old now and incapable of carrying children. He did not ask for beauty. There was a brown patch on the hand which had clutched the rusty dress. Would she never go? He

undid the top button of his waistcoat, and watched her turning to leave the cubicle. In a fury of impatience, he tore the other buttons undone; there was a crack; one had left the stuff, spun across the space, fallen by the door. He stood watching, as she swayed, bent creaking to pick it up. "I'll sew it on for you," she said. "Take off your waistcoat and give it me." He was wearing no shirt; if he took off his waistcoat, he would be naked to his navel. "I can do it myself," he told her. "It's a woman's job," she chuckled. "Oughtn't to be ashamed of your body in front of an old woman like me. Never mind. Throw it over the top, when you're undressed." He was astonished. "Thank you," he said, and as she went, pulling the door behind, so that the latch clicked, he thought more kindly of her for having spared him. Not that he was ashamed; not exactly; he would throw the waistcoat over the top, but when he had finished bathing, he would fetch it himself and let her see him. He would feel younger, stronger, when he was washed. He sat down on the white chair under the window, and began painfully to undo his bootlaces. Outside he could hear the attendant moving about. He wondered if she was looking into his perambulator, looking at his pictures. He could not have that, if he were not there to see. The conviction that she was prying oppressed him, so he took off his waistcoat and, calling out, threw it across the top of his cubicle. There seemed to be very little strength in his arm, and he dropped wearily into the chair again. He heard the old woman go along the passage, probably to find a needle and thread. As he stuffed his socks into the heavy boots he had just taken off, he wondered if there were not time to creep out and look at his beloved picture; but the old woman might come back, or someone else come in, and discover him half naked, looking at a Sunday Annual. He went over

the picture in his memory, as he undid the buttons of his trousers, trying to project its image upon the door in front of him. He did not want to see his body before he had bathed. Queen Mary, so young and healthy, and tender, was holding Jesus Christ in her lap; and he, fat and lusty, kicking and pulling, smiled up at . . . Surely he would have been smiling at his father. They had shown the frame too, round and carved; the mother's head was bent, so that it followed the line of the frame, yet it did not seem unnatural; she appeared to be asking herself what he wanted, what more she could do for him. She was entirely wrapped up in the child, ignorant of her husband, if he was really standing by. But the man who had slipped off his trousers, hung them upon the black-enamelled wire hook behind the door, and now stood naked, feeling with his feet the wooden rungs of the flooring, would not have minded being forgotten by that mother, if he could gaze at the child too, and at her, in the flesh.

There was a knot in the middle board of the door, a little higher than the latch; it was narrower at the top, and the brightness from the sun, shining through the upper, unfrosted, half of the window, seemed balanced on its point. Below this line, the reflection was mottled by the opaqueness of the glass; hundreds of little golden motes danced upon the wood; on the ground, below the gap where the door swung clear of the drain-boarding, the angle at which the glass caught the sun had magnified these motes into great flakes of light, moving flaccidly like shining cotton-wool. As he looked, remembering the colours of his picture, he felt the pillar of cold air between his legs, which seemed to press upwards at his trunk, and stepped into the bath, laying himself down in it directly.

Intense pain battered every cell of his skin; the bath was

far too hot, but he did not get up again. Instead, to neutralise the agony, he concentrated on further details of the picture. It was only a photograph in his Sunday Annual, but once he had seen the real thing in its frame, in the window of a religious repository in the Winchester High Street; it was marked "Reproduction of Raphael's Masterpiece—Price Three Guineas," and he could remember every detail of the colouring, the almost tralucent whiteness of Queen Mary's headdress, and the rosiness of her cheek, the rich spinach green, and the red of her clothes. He forced himself to remember the very folds and shadows. As his body became accustomed to the violent heat, he moved himself slightly backwards and forwards, rubbing his buttocks upon the rough patches where the enamel had come away. Every time he moved, his body tingled anew. At last he sat upright, and for a moment his back and chest burned evenly, rather than stung him, then cooled. Bending forward, he sluiced the water over his head, and it trickled down his rounded back. It was more comfortable like this, he thought, and wondered than what. More comfortable, he told himself, pouring the water over his head. Then he remembered; after his riding turn in the circus, when he was glued with sweat and dust, he used to run to the dressing-tent. There, he had sat over a bucket and rinsed his body with cold water. He had just had time to dry his glowing limbs, before dressing in black velvet for his special turn—a variety turn, really; he would have made money, perhaps, if he could have got on to the Halls—quick drawing and caricaturing on the blackboard. He wondered what might have happened if he had not left his gipsy band to follow this incomprehensible bent for drawing. As it was, he had fallen from Dappled Darling one day and broken his leg; when he came out of hospital, his place in the troupe had

been filled. He could still feel the stiffness in his leg occasionally; he had never ridden since, though he had had jobs with horses sometimes. At any rate, he would not have been lonely; he would have had children, possibly grandchildren. Something in him repudiated this fact; he seemed to forget it, began to lather his head with the yellow soap. When the lather was stiff and thick, so that his hair stood up on end, he began to transfer it to his chest. Then he stood up, and massaged the creamy stuff into his neck, under his armpits; coiling his arms around him clumsily, he soaped his back. With rhythmical, sweeping movements, he covered the whole of his body in the white foam, down to where the water cut his legs in two. Last of all, he rubbed it into his moustache, into the bristles on his face. Now he was encased in a shell of warmth. He undulated, moving his shoulder-blades, his stomach muscles, bending his legs, as if to stretch his skin and let the cleanness into every pore. He swayed slightly, caressing the sheer feel of it. Reluctantly he bent down, rested a hand upon the edge of the bath, lowered himself into the water. It was solid and heavy, and as his body cut into it, lifted the foam from off him, leaving a white spume upon its surface. Underneath was his new body; it would be cold when he sat up, and clean. He dragged his knees towards him, so that he might wash his feet, without sitting up. His toe nails were yellow and cracked and full of dirt. He could not clean them. Then he sat up, and in one movement was on his knees. The Corporation allowed one as much cold as one liked. He turned on the tap, and putting his head under it, let the icy water run through his hair, so that when he felt it, it was lank and sticky. The coldness trickled behind his ears, down his back. He held up his head, so that the water ran over his face, and cleaned his long moustache.

As he raised himself, he wiped away some of the soap which clung upon his leg. He stepped out of the bath, holding on to the taps to steady himself. Then he began to dry; when he had wiped off the surplus wet, he rubbed himself, using the little towel like a loofah, with which to burnish the flesh. He lifted one leg on to the chair, and almost scraped the tender skin between his legs. He was surprised, looking at his belly; it appeared so white and flabby. Wondering a little, he pulled himself up to stand upon the edge of the bath; there was a looking-glass on the wall, but he did not want to look at his face. His stomach was not big, but it seemed to him grotesquely loose; almost it hung like a half-filled bag. His chest too was hollow, and the skin was drawn thinly across his ribs. Suddenly he saw his body in terms of imagined, loathsome colours and shadows; grey hollows, the greenness of the grey walls; bones picked out in blues and livid yellows. For a moment he began to swoon. He shook himself, as if to pull himself together. True, he was thin and his chest was unhealthily pale, but that was because he had starved so often, had so often walked long miles with an empty stomach. He had once been brown and strong, not so long ago. Poising himself precariously, he stood slowly upon the toes of one foot. The other leg, which he stuck out behind him, was heavy, hardly a part of himself. Somehow so he had leapt upon the back of Dappled Darling. One hand was against the wall across the bath, supporting him. Tentatively he removed it, waving his arms ineffectually to balance him. The sun streamed through the upper half of the windows, but its honest rays did not warm him. He seemed to shrink before them. Then he slipped, fell in his effort to recover himself, and stubbed a big toe on the drain-boards. Groaning, he sank upon the chair, and began to pull on his socks. As he fell,

he had caught a glimpse of his head in the glass; the stubble on his face was grey, and his moustache drooped. His hair was dirty coloured, greying.

He heard the attendant coming back along the passage. With his eyes fixed on the latch of the door, he pulled on first his trousers, then his boots, but he did not trouble to lace them. He must get it over. Holding his coat by the hanger, he emerged from the cubicle, out of the sun, into the damp darkness. There was not triumph in his presence. He took his waistcoat from the old woman, striving to see it in the darkness. He wanted only to sit down. Beside the perambulator was a bench. He stumbled to it, and sat with the coat and waistcoat across his knees, shivering slightly. Why did that old hag not ask about his pram? He wanted her to force an answer he would not give, to torture him.

Then suddenly his mood changed. Something like confidence came into his bearing. "I used to think there'd be a kid in it one day," he said. The woman's laughing eyes did not alter their expression, but he felt that her body was compassionate. He leaned forward, and dragged the Sunday Annual from under the pile of drawings, which soon he must try to sell, or use as a bait to beg a few coppers. He took a bit of coloured crayon from his pocket, and with one hand turned over the pages till he found his picture.

Idly he scratched at the picture with his chalk, drew in upon the sweet face of Queen Mary a long drooping red moustache. "I'm too old now." He had almost forgotten that he was not alone; was caressing his grief. Slowly, with care, he tore the page out of the book, and crumpled it into a ball. The picture was defaced, useless to him now, anyway.

STRUTHERS BURT

Entertaining the Islanders[1]

We present this month the first instalment of Mr. Struthers Burt's new novel, Entertaining the Islanders. *The scene is a West Indian tropical island, and a portrait of the Governor opens a vivid story in which Mr. Burt's ironic humour has full play.*

The Governor is a fussy moralist, and Mr. Julius Wack, a wealthy retired manufacturer of floor polish, is a thorn in his side. David Banastre and Anita Fulton, who meet in New York, are later to come together on the island, which, enriched by Mr. Wack's philosophy, the Governor's fussiness and the affairs and lives of the native islanders, provides an original and entertaining background to their love story.

I

THE Governor had the thinnest legs imaginable. There seemed to be nothing below the unenthusiastic bulge of his badly cut brown golf breeches except a bone and a couple of long taut muscles. These ended, after over-emphasising themselves in a pair of bony ankles, in somewhat soiled buckskin shoes with tan tips. The Governor was one of those tall, thin, melancholy men who invariably choose the most unbecoming colours, as if by so doing they express

[1] *Entertaining the Islanders*, by Struthers Burt. Lovat Dickson, 8*s*. 6*d*. net.

somehow the contempt of the spirit for the flesh. In the Governor's case, as is usual with tall, thin, melancholy men who are also dark, and who have drooping dark moustaches, the colour was brown. Not gay or golden brown, but a sordid brown.

The Governor subscribed to the heat and general laxity of the tropics by wearing a wrinkled linen coat and a white sun-helmet, but beyond that he would not go. Below the waist he was northern and evangelical and professorial—now that professors and evangelical ministers have taken to golf and plus-fours. The Governor could never forget that he had once been president of a small Ohio Methodist College from which the late Mrs. Gilder, the only daughter of a grimly pious steel king, had translated him to a life of unrelieved charity and thick, dejected luxury. The Governor's slightly sardonic manner came from the fact that, having decided to deny any pleasure to wickedness, he had not found goodness particularly thrilling.

Mr. Julius Wack disliked the Governor's sartorial obstinacy almost more than he disliked the Governor's other ideas and traits, and that was saying a good deal. He could not help liking the Governor in a certain way, and pitying him, but that was different from liking what the Governor said, or did, or put on his back. He assumed, and not incorrectly, that the Governor's wilfulness was symptomatic of a deep, yet in a way humble, conceit, and a reformer's sense of superiority. To flout the world in small matters was not a sign of spirituality, or even absent-mindedness, but a sign that you thought so well of yourself, and so little of others, that you didn't care how you looked. Independence of mind, Mr. Wack had long ago decided, consisted in subscribing to the minor conventions and, when necessary, breaking the major ones. He hated the Governor's legs. A man with legs like

that should hide them, should drape them decorously in the most beautiful and winsome of trousers. The Governor's legs affronted all Mr. Wack's theories about the urgency for life being glamorous, and filled with good smells, and lovely colours, and moments highly prized.

Mr. Wack was Chairman of the St. Birgitta Insular Council and therefore ex-officio Vice-Chairman of the Inter-Insular Council, which consisted of twelve members, outside of officers, selected from the various councils of the islands of St. Birgitta, St. Olaf and St. Hildegard; a Council which ruled the local affairs of these three islands and was supposed as well to rule the local affairs of the innumerable smaller islands, strung out to the west in a disappearing succession like the tail of a comet, and which were known as the Birgitines. But the Birgitines did not count. Many of them were uninhabited and those which were inhabited nourished only a few fishing families of nondescript colour and race who had never known the blessings of civilisation or modern government. Every now and then a dirty small sailboat hove up over the horizon and, entering the almost closed, halberd-like crescent of St. Birgitta's harbour, deposited a crew of three or four half-naked black men and a cargo of gorgeously coloured fish. The crew spoke a creole English, mixed with a few words of creole French and Spanish, that even the natives of St. Birgitta, speaking creole English themselves, had difficulty in understanding. Apart from these rare incursions no one thought of the Birgitines at all, except when occasionally a St. Birgittan, more adventurous than the rest, sitting on the veranda of his villa high above the town and contentedly drinking a swizzle at dusk, stared across the town and the halberd-like harbour to where, amethyst upon a silvering sea, the first of the little islands slid toward the horizon.

One person, however, thought a good deal about the

Birgitines, and that was the Governor. He worried about them, as he worried about everything else. He wished that the people who lived on them would wear more clothes and he also suspected that they didn't go in for marriage as much as they should. After all, how could they? They were miles away from any priests or parsons. A dream of the Governor's was to get from Washington, once the depression was over, an appropriation for a little gospel-launch, altar and hymn-books and everything, and perhaps a few golf breeches in the hold, and then every so often to send a minister cruising in order to marry those Birgitinians who most needed it.

He was thinking about the Birgitines now as he sat on the veranda of Government House, hoping that Mr. Wack wasn't going to stay too long. There was no use talking to Mr. Wack about the Birgitines or the gospel-launch. The Governor for two years had been trying this without success. Mr. Wack, usually so willing to listen to argument, was adamant. He was scurrilous. He said that he thought the Birgitines were singularly blessed in that they knew nothing either of formal religion or the American government, and most certainly he wasn't going to be a party to the destruction of such a Utopia.

"Do you think," he asked, "in this crisis of the world's affairs I would thrust upon these innocent islands your face or mine, or the unsmiling countenance of the American eagle?"

Mr. Wack affronted the Governor as much as the Governor affronted Mr. Wack. The Governor could not imagine a person more antipathetic than Mr. Wack. Mr. Wack's round, smooth, expensively clad, fairly diminutive body, his round, smooth, alert and good-humoured face, seemed to the Governor the epitome of all he had spent his life in combating. Whenever you saw Mr. Wack you thought of dreadful places

like Paris. Even Mr. Wack's shock of vibrant, completely white hair, carefully brushed up from his forehead, added to the conviction of a lack of inhibitions that had become a set of principles. Worthy, hard-working men who did not care about their appearance either went bald or else turned iron-grey. In the Governor's mind were vague memories of melodramas, surreptitiously seen in a Methodist youth, in which the dissipated villain invariably had a healthy head of hair, completely white. After fifty, robust health was rather immoral, anyway. Earnest Christians usually by that time had indigestion. If you added to hair completely white, raisin-like black eyes, for the most part deliberately expressionless, but at times filled with an innocent sort of malice, and at others, bright with amusement, the evidence was complete. The moment the Governor had encountered Mr. Wack he had decided that Mr. Wack had wicked eyes. He had told his sister, who kept house for him, so that night.

" Yes ! " said Miss Gilder, with the decisive manner of one who is habitually wrong. " Piercing blue ! "

And yet the Governor knew that below the surface Mr. Wack was in many ways a good man and a kind one. That was the annoying part of it. How could vice and virtue be so mixed ?

It was the irony of Fate, which, the Governor had noticed, seemed particularly to pursue the conscientious, that of all people Mr. Wack should be the one most to be consulted whenever Mr. Wack was in residence on the island. In his capacity as Chairman of the St. Birgitta Council Mr. Wack was an important person. He was an important person anyway, which was the reason why he was chairman of the council. He was the island's richest inhabitant; indeed, the only inhabitant who seemed in the least carefree about wealth. This was because, back in " the States," he had inherited and

made great from tiny beginnings that famous product, Wack's White Wax, which, as everyone knows, is used on every floor anyone cares anything about or where anyone dances. If there was an emergency in St. Birgitta, or St. Olaf, or St. Hildegard, Mr. Wack stepped into the breach. If there was an individual case for charity, Mr. Wack attended to it. When a hurricane devastated St. Olaf in nineteen-twenty-eight, Mr. Wack replanted the trees, cleaned up the debris, provided for the orphans and rebuilt the houses.

There was another hold Mr. Wack had upon the public fancy, especially the fancy of the Governor. He seemed to be on intimate terms with a number of Congressmen and Senators, and there were occasions when this intimacy enabled him to overcome even the jocund disregard of continental legislators for insular possessions. He had been known to obtain funds for new roads and sorely needed public buildings, and he could of course at any time set in motion a Visiting Commission. He had given up doing the latter, however. It seemed hardly worth while, even if the Senators and Congressmen enjoyed themselves so much. The last Visiting Commission had written its report long before it had reached the islands.

In short, during the six or seven months—usually June to December, or January—that Mr. Wack was absent, the islands slept in scented alternate rain or rain-washed sun, or, sometimes, in great hot calms, or piercing heat, but then they slept restlessly, and did not waken to full-fledged life until Mr. Wack's white yacht rounded the blue headland of Spanish Point and dropped anchor in the deep waters of the halberd-like harbour.

The Governor sighed, crossed one perilously thin leg over the other, and folded long, sensitive hands over the concavity which was his stomach.

"How about some more limeade, Mr. Wack?" he suggested.

He hoped Mr. Wack wasn't going to stay too long, and yet he realised that he took a perverse pleasure and excitement in Mr. Wack's company. It was a good deal like doing battle with Apollyon. The Governor had heard of psychoanalysis, but didn't believe in it, so the word masochist failed to disturb his ardent, if somewhat irritable sense of a Christian gentleman combating evil. On his part, Mr. Wack felt much the same way about the Governor. They were like two lovers who can't abide each other.

At the Governor's question a slight grimace disturbed Mr. Wack's nose and mouth. He was sitting forward alertly on the edge of his wicker chair, elbows on its arms, fingers locked in front of his double-breasted coat, and the start with which he had awakened belied his alertness. He was engrossed in thoughts of his own.

"Oh no, thanks!" he said hastily.

He was wondering why he always had to see the Governor between four and six in the afternoon. That, as everyone knew, was the time you drank swizzles, and a very pleasant occupation it was, too. When he was north, or in Europe, or, sometimes, in Asia, one of the dreams that came most frequently to him was of drinking swizzles on a tropic veranda just before and during a tropic dusk. This, and tropic dawns, seemed to him the principal reasons why the tropics had been invented. People and things and places were ultimately desirable because of the differences, often small, that made them large and individual. No two things were ever exactly alike. There were no perfect synonyms. But even more, people and things and places were desirable because of the reiterations of their especial charms and goodnesses. It was necessary to live in the moment, but it was also necessary to

remember that the moment was only a small fraction of the day. At high noon, for example, what countryside did not look wan and harsh? It was necessary to recollect the freshness of morning or the slanting light of evening. You had to hunt for this separateness, these distinctions, these reiterations, and be able to recognise them when you saw them, and you had to have the sort of memory which in hours of dullness recalls moments of delight.

Even the most beloved or most beautiful of persons was on the average not so lovable or beautiful, and the average hour of the average day was likely to be dull. Moreover, climate on the whole and everywhere was bad. But if you remembered those recurrent shafts of beauty that light up certain persons as a room is lit from outside until it seems lit from within, until, that is, external light and internal light are the same, and everything seems light, and if you recalled those repeated intervals of loveliness that distinguish this latitude or that, life immediately became more reasonable. In this way even the dullest day if properly arranged might rise to an apex of enchantment. . . . Noon in May in Paris at a café, tea in June in London, April nights in Egypt, luncheon at a good speakeasy in New York on a shining cold day in February when the air seemed to crunch with sun and frost, and so on, and so on indefinitely. And then, of course, an equal number of spiritual and mental apexes. They could usually be found in one shape or another. You had, however, to think a good deal about life and be alert to it, and you had to fight constantly those hordes who all through history had been enemies of ecstasy.

. . . Mr. Wack was aware that Paris, London, Egypt, in the guises in which he saw them, even New York speakeasies, were only for the fortunate few like himself, but apexes could be kept in mind by everyone even if they were no more than

washing your face in cold water when you were dirty and tired.

For the most part tropic days were not much to boast of. The sharp light cut away all colour and the trade wind was like a beneficent but irritating housewife. With the waning afternoon, however, a lovely miracle expanded. The day grew quiet, and the palm trees seemed to swell with living green, and the sea, from a thin blue plaque, immense and brittle, turned turquoise of unknown layers, and the bougainvillæa was alive as if with actual calm blood, and from the town at your feet, drifting up through the leaves of oleanders and avocado pears and flamboyants, and acacias and tamarinds, came a placid murmur. And there were smells, too, and that was heavenly, for as a rule the tropics did not smell in winter except of sun and dust, and man-made smells which were bad. But with evening, people lit out-of-door cooking fires, and the blue smoke, acridly sweet, rose up as blue as the misty encircling mountains.

Where food and drink were concerned the bewildered human race had often shown genius. Without the tropics there would have been no swizzles, and without swizzles tropic dusks, brief as the single stroke of a bell, would have lost their resonance. But you got no swizzles with the Governor. No, indeed, you got limeade.

The Governor's pale grey eyes, the opaque eyes of a man who is constantly examining his own interior, physical and mental, turned from Mr. Wack as if with relief and surveyed mildly and without interest the thickening dusk. In the town at the foot of the hill, in the blue dusk, lights were shining, and out in the harbour a tramp steamer and Mr. Wack's yacht were outlined in fire.

The veranda was wide, as are most West Indian verandas, and the railing in this instance was of wrought iron; bunches

of grapes and grape leaves. Wrought-iron uprights with the same design rose at intervals to a gay swooping roof of striped green and grey tin. Beyond the railing was a long garden enclosed by a high, yellow wall. Vines grew everywhere, along the railing, up the wall, around every tree from which they were not frequently torn, and the uprights of the verandah were almost hidden by jasmine. In the garden hibiscus and poinsettia and roses and canna were in bloom, and a bois trembler, delicate and like an aspen, shivered faintly without any wind. At the foot of the garden, recessed into the wall, was a dry fountain and the battered head of a Bacchus. A Mexican general, fleeing half a century before from the Liberals —or perhaps it was the Conservatives ?—had built the house.

Mr. Wack thought it odd, and just like life, that the Governor should be sitting on such a veranda at such a moment. By rights he should have been in some minor but wealthy suburban home reading the evening newspaper and misinterpreting the news.

He sighed.

" Yes, I know," said the Governor in his slightly sardonic voice as if life was an over-repeated joke. " It's all rather hopeless. Not much can be done, can it ? But at least this year, thank goodness, we had no hurricane." He paused, and then spoke doggedly, as if expecting to be challenged. " I tell you it's immorality, and you can argue about it all you want. Immorality—and sugar. Immorality produces an economic lack of responsibility. Of course," he added hastily, " I am referring to the lower classes."

Mr. Wack's eyes twinkled as if he were saying silently, " Thank you."

" Ah, yes ! " he sighed. " Immorality ! A dreadful thing. . . . That is, if you know what it is. I've no doubt it's responsible for the world-wide depression, especially in England."

His voice was faintly flute-like with a fine resonance in the upper register. Often it was meditative; sometimes hortatory. When he was moved at all, he was likely to speak quickly in broken sentences.

The Governor's eyes became acutely suspicious.

"I don't exactly see the point."

"No," said Mr. Wack, still in a sighing voice, "I don't think there is any." He got to his feet, a dapper figure in his double-breasted blue serge coat, his yellow pongee silk necktie, his faultless white flannels and white shoes. He stooped and picked up his panama hat and rattan cane from the tiled floor where he had deposited them beside the chair in which he had been sitting, then he straightened up and with a brilliant smile took the hand of the Governor, who had also risen. "Well, good-bye," he said. "I must be getting back to the boat. I think we've discussed about everything there is to be discussed. Give my regards to Miss Gilder. The next Council meeting is Tuesday week, isn't it?"

He withdrew his hand hastily. The Governor's hand had the absent-minded batrachian limpness of the good man whose blood pressure is low.

The Governor nodded.

"The first Tuesday of the month as usual."

He walked with Mr. Wack to the edge of the veranda.

"When are you actually coming ashore to occupy your house?"

"In three days or so. It's easier to live on the boat until everything is in order. Well, good-bye. . . . Good-bye."

Mr. Wack walked down the long flight of stone steps that led to the gate which opened upon the precipitous street. Darkness was complete by now, and to the darkness was added the heavy shadows of the shrubs and bamboo and rose bushes that bordered the steps.

II

The coruscant moment that for a while sparkles so beautifully and then dies down horribly into an extinction white and like unblown-upon ashes, may come to the man of imagination any time after the third drink, depending upon what the drink is and the state of health of the imbiber. David had had four highballs, and so, with the fine bold decision that he would keep on drinking as long as there was anything left to drink, he arose from the end of the long-chair where he had been sitting, and, walking across the room with more dignity and precision than was necessary, poured out two more drinks at the Florentine table. He poured one drink for himself and an equally large one for the blonde girl whom he had left at the other, the pillow end, of the long-chair. Then he put cubes of ice into the tall glasses and filled them to the brim with ginger ale . . . a delicious drink, to those who like it, and one that indicates a person who hates the taste of whisky but cherishes the effect.

David, with his ability to stand off and look at himself, was aware that the apex of the coruscant moment was near at hand. One more drink and it would be reached. Already, exalting itself from the opinion of two hours before that the blonde girl was pretty and more intelligent than most, was the growing conviction that she was unbearably lovely and that her husband, seen for a moment . . . a tall, dark, white-faced, handsome young man . . . was to be avoided and disliked. There was about him the air of the spoiled rich; the absent-minded, insincere good humour toward other men of the accustomed and satisfied philanderer, traits that more than ever confirmed David in his intention to make love to the blonde girl. Indeed, to make love to her became almost a duty.

David was stirring with a long spoon the two long drinks

he had poured. For an instant he looked down at them and his mouth twisted.

Philanderer ?

Amusing !

And what was he, David, but a philanderer ? Everybody nowadays seemed to be more or less of a philanderer. As far as it was possible to perceive, philandering was the latest, almost universal attitude of the sexes toward each other. The hysteria and noise of the jazz-period, which had been for the most part mere sound and half timorous, if defiant experiment, and the showing of legs, had settled down into something far more deadly and direct and expert. Women had lowered their skirts but raised their eyes. It was the same with drinking and conversation as with dresses. People drank far more regularly than they had ever done, but more quietly; dresses had assumed a surface modesty but were far more provocative; conversation had become stark and unquestioned.

Well, what of it ?

David shrugged his shoulders.

One lived in one's generation and followed its customs.

And, after all, the present was a far easier and kinder and more pleasant period than the one, thirty-five years before, into which he had been born. This was a nice party, and he was beginning to feel splendidly, and the blonde girl was lovely, and already she had looked at him at least twice in a way that showed that she was also finding him not unattractive.

He glanced sideways to where Marian, leaning back on a sofa, was pre-occupied with her guest of honour. Marian made no pretence of faithfulness, so why should he ? As a matter of fact, he never had. In the three years he and Marian had known each other both had done exactly what they wanted. That had been part of the agreement, laid down by Marian. He remembered with a small rueful smile how at

first he had felt it almost imperative to be jealous. Not to be jealous had seemed to his Southern tradition an insult both to Marian and an intimate relationship, but Marian had shown him how young and provincial and stupid that was. Now he wasn't in the least bit jealous. Marian could pre-occupy herself with her guest of honour, or anyone else, as much as she liked, God bless her! When she got ready, she could return to him . . . perhaps. He had come especially to this party because he had hoped, as had so often happened in the past, that he would be allowed to stay after the other guests had departed, but now he did not want to stay. He was no longer interested in staying, even if the opportunity were given.

The Florentine table was mournful and softly muddled, like a mediæval abbot who has got drunk knowing it to be a sin. The priest's vestment, cloth of gold with green stripes, which usually hung across its centre, had been removed, and so had the snuff-boxes and the books with their special bindings of tooled leather, but the high ecclesiastical candlesticks of silvered wood that had been turned into lamps were still there, shining down from under their parchment shades upon what at the beginning of the party had been an orderly array of sandwiches, glasses, decanters filled with whisky, bowls of ice and bottles of ginger ale and soda-water.

Man was a damned dirty animal, especially since cigarette smoking had become universal!

David hesitated for an instant longer. He laid the long spoon down on a pewter cigarette box, where it made an amber smear.

He thought perhaps he would put a little more whisky into both glasses, especially into the glass of the blonde girl. Then he made a nose of disgust, and picking up the glasses, threaded his way back to the corner where the long-chair was. He'd

be damned if he would put too much whisky into any girl's glass! He had a little decency left even after fourteen post-War years in New York. It made him a trifle sick that he had even thought of such a thing. If the girl wanted to get drunk, she could get drunk on her own account.

His course was not a straight one because he had to wind his way around groups sitting on the square stools and the chairs of zebra hide, or on the floor. Most of these groups were arguing about this or that—mostly about plays or books, or about someone's character, and it seemed to David, momentarily concentrated and clear-headed, that they were all shouting too much and all using the biggest and most startling terms imaginable. When you listened to them objectively like this they sounded like children just graduated from a too repressive school. Because until the turn of the century ladies were supposed to sit on ether, now you said "behind" on every possible occasion. David wondered what parties he liked better; the parties of the supposedly clever or the parties of the frankly dull. He was coming to the conclusion that he didn't like either.

He resumed his place at the end of the long-chair. On its surface of white leather, glassy as crusted snow, the tails of his evening coat spread out like pools of ink. The blonde girl, leaning back on the cushions, smiled at him and extended a hand for her glass. She sipped slowly and continued to smile over the edge of her glass. She had fascinating eyes, violet and extremely long, so that most of the time they looked quizzical and smiling even when the rest of her face was serious, and every now and then when she was pleased, as she had been at David's return, they opened wide and stayed that way for a while, and then they were curiously and smilingly brilliant. David noticed that there were sun-rays in them. That was because, behind the violet, was a hint of hazel.

He, who when completely sober still suffered from a shyness that made it difficult for him to look at a strange and pretty woman directly, surveyed her for a lingering instant from head to foot. After all, if you were going to make love to a woman you should know what she looked like. Make love? Well, that was taking a lot for granted. Still—one had intuitions. For the first time he was pleased that in the background was that tall, over-handsome young man. You knew just where you stood with a married woman. There was no nonsense about it—so long, that is, as you were wise enough to steer clear of a divorce.

She was satisfactory . . . eminently. There was none of the dismaying non-completion that so often happens with people with beautiful eyes. Curved eyebrows, dark golden, marked a warm white skin that showed faint colour in the cheeks, and blonde hair, of a lighter, more shining gold, worn short and parted at the side, fitted in long waves a small head. Her eyelashes, long and dark golden, were thoughtful. She lowered and raised them as if she were listening intently to what you said.

"A really intelligent girl," David reflected. "Well—they're always the easiest to make love to . . . if things haven't gone right with them." For a moment he felt sorry for her and a trifle angry at his own cold-bloodedness. He looked at her nose. It was small and intelligent and appealing, and below the red of make-up her medium-sized mouth was intelligent, too, and passionate, and a little cruel. David, however, detected generosity as well, as is often the case with a mouth that is temperamental and, at times, cruel.

His appraisal, naturally, had considered her chin, round and firm and questioning, and her young neck and warm shoulders emerging from a tight-fitting dress of shimmering blue velvet, and it had more than equally allotted itself to her figure. She

was small and compact but long-lined and beautifully proportioned. This meant that she was strong and graceful. David liked compactness if its lines were long enough. He liked concentration both of flesh and mind; not a rounded, circumscribed compactness, but a perpendicular compactness that reached up. Nor was this altogether physical. The body and mind were closely allied. For the most part graceful people were at least graceful-minded whatever else might be said of them. Often on a street he felt himself dislocatingly interested by the way some woman ahead of him walked.

The girl, watching him from under lowered eyelashes, laughed softly.

"Was it all right—the examination?"

David sat back and surveyed her with coolly assessing eyes.

"Cursory, of course."

She sipped her whisky and smiled secretly.

"Odd, the change in manners. Twenty years ago women were supposed to be insulted by that sort of thing."

"They never were—really. What else are they made for? Besides, frank admiration must be gratifying."

"Well—with reservations. One likes to feel that one has something of a brain also. And then, of course, it depends on the man."

David looked down at his glass and turned it in his hand.

"The choice in that respect would appear to be widening. At moments, it seems as if almost any man would do."

"Why, of course, if that's all you're looking for. Like finds like."

David raised his head resentfully.

"That's not fair. I'm extremely particular." He leaned forward a trifle, holding her eyes. "It takes a rather exceptional woman to interest me in the slightest." He was too experienced to be earnest.

For a moment her eyes met his squarely and the hazel lights in them danced, then she chuckled.

"You really believe that yourself, don't you?" she asked. "Or at least, you make yourself believe it." She sighed. "What creatures men are!"

David sat back. He sighed in his turn.

"And what creatures women are!"

He stared again at the sofa where Marian and the guest of honour were engrossed with each other. Marian's tall, shadowy beauty stood out against the silver background, Marian belonged to the camarilla of dark, quiet, graceful women who even in their wildest and most inhuman moments manage to seem gentle. No matter what Marian did she would never achieve a really bad reputation. Her complete selfishness was what made her so gentle and so impossible to argue with. David's lips twisted at the sight of the guest of honour. The guest of honour resembled a blond sheep. His fuzzy, almost albino hair glittered faintly in the light of the candles. As a rule it was blond sheep who wrote dismaying books. The experienced and the hard-boiled realised that life was never quite so terrible as it seemed. The guest of honour came from Alabama and had written a novel of the deep South that at the moment was delighting New York; a New York which knew nothing of the South but was glad as usual to hear the worst.

The blonde girl, still smiling, sat forward.

David could see the beginnings of her small round breasts and the brown shadow that lay between them.

She followed David's gaze in the direction of the guest of honour.

"What do you think of his books?" she asked. She had a slow questioning voice that sometimes, in moments of amusement or contradiction, became eager and liquid.

David with apparent absent-mindedness put his hand on one of her slim ankles. She looked down at the hand and then up, her eyes more than ever amused.

David turned to her, wrinkling his nose.

"I don't know." When he was talking seriously he had a trick of beginning with a slow speech and a muffled voice as if he wasn't sure of the wisdom of his remarks, but as he became caught up in a conversation his words tumbled over each other. "I've glanced through his last . . . one has to. It seems to me one-sided. Even poor whites occasionally laugh. I think most of these fellows write their books when they're drunk. I don't know. I hardly ever read novels—I haven't time. That sounds stupid, doesn't it? But I don't mean it that way, I just haven't time. I appreciate the value of novels. And I ought to have opinions about Southern novels; I lived there until I was twenty."

"What part of the South?"

"The Yemasse country—south-west of Charleston."

"Then you're a South Carolinian. I thought you were from the South from the way you talk."

"I suppose so—it's hard to lose, although I've only been back once since the War. I left sixteen years ago. I live in New York."

"You've got a nice voice. I'm glad you haven't lost it. Just enough of the South to soften your consonants. Those are what I have to watch, coming from Lake Michigan. . . . What do you do?"

"I'm vice-president of an advertising firm."

"And you don't want to go South again?"

David shrugged his shoulders.

"It's a romantic idea but an impossible one. I have to make a living."

She was thoughtful. David discovered another charac-

teristic. When she was reflective she frequently knit her brows and hesitated, as if she were hunting for the right statement and the right word.

" I'm not sure. I'd like to know what this making a living is. No one I know ever seems to have enough money, no matter how rich they are. You can't catch up with your expenditure in places like this. Why isn't it equally important, or more so, to make a life ? I think people should be prepared to make a living anywhere and be really part of things. Monsters like New York and Chicago are half of what is the matter with us. I've been thinking about that a lot lately."

David wanted to tell her that he thought it charming that she really thought, and that he, too—when he had time—had been thinking along the same lines. When he had time ! And he also wanted to tell her that her face lit up like a sea-shell with the sun back of it when she was stirred, and that her eyes grew dark the way they did when she was pleased. But at the moment all this seemed too great an effort. He would save it until another time. He contented himself with shrugging his shoulders again.

" Perhaps, but in my case I was born poor as a church mouse on a place that had starved my family to death. Now it's let to a tenant farmer. I don't want to see it again. My aunt, who lives with me, goes back once a year to Charleston and wallows in tradition. It's her way of getting drunk."

" And you don't believe that that tradition could possibly be brought up to date ? I've no illusions about the past, but I do think some of our ancestors had a better time. My grandfather built a railway. He was a dreadful old man, but he was absurdly happy."

" You'd have a hard time bringing my tradition up to date. My tradition is the tradition of the land-owning South—I'm not speaking of the cities like Charleston, or the professional

or business South. For all I know these may have been brought up to date."

"Well, what's worth doing that isn't hard?"

"Talking to you."

"Do you know, I rather like you better when you're serious. You don't know me well enough yet to say that."

"Yes I do. . . . It's interesting and easy to talk to you."

"How do you know it's worth while?"

"Isn't it?"

"I wonder?"

David glanced again at Marian and the guest of honour. By degrees the guest of honour was sliding along the sofa toward Marian, looking up at her like a fascinated but reluctant ram. He was getting drunk, David decided, in good old Alabaman fashion; getting drunk with the intention of getting drunk. Sobriety could no longer take him where he wanted to go, or support the mounting glory of life.

"One has to make a living," he repeated sombrely. He straightened up. "Come on, let's drink!"

The blonde girl laughed.

"The world's filled with desperate people nowadays, isn't it?"

David smiled.

"Are you desperate?"

She knit her eyebrows.

"Why, yes . . . I suppose so."

"Why?"

"That wouldn't interest you."

"I thought you were desperate. Yes, it would interest me. Am I desperate?"

"Obviously."

"I'm not at all. As a matter of fact, it's only in the last few years that I've had a good time."

The girl leaned back on the cushions of the long-chair, staring at David thoughtfully.

"Are you sure it's a good time? You don't look to me terribly contented."

David laughed. "That's my dark complexion—I'm saturnine. Yes, it's a good time. I've discovered that there's nothing worth bothering about except to have enough of what you want not to bother. Besides, I'm no longer as shy as I was. The world's smaller."

He finished the whisky and ginger ale in his glass.

"That's silly," said the girl, "and I don't believe a word of it. Anyway, the world shouldn't get smaller. The wiser you are, the bigger it ought to seem and the more mysterious. That's the reason so many people are bored nowadays . . . they're fooled by surface things and think the world's small. Are you still shy . . . really?"

"I'm going to get a bottle and some more of this ginger ale," David said. "It's too much trouble crossing the room every time we want a drink."

"I don't want any more."

"Oh yes, you do."

He went over to the Florentine table and came back.

"There . . .!" he said, sitting down again and sighing contentedly. "By the way, what's your name?"

"My last name? . . . Fulton. I come from Chicago."

"Yes, I know that. Your first name."

"Anita."

"Not a bad name, although too many movie stars have it."

"And what's your name?"

"David Banastre."

"That's even more impressive."

"It was the first name of Lieutenant-Colonel Banastre

Tarleton who raided my country during the Revolution. Curiously enough, his ancestors and mine were related."

"It's a nice name."

David finished half of his new drink.

"And you," he said with bright objective abruptness, "have the loveliest legs—what I can see of them—I've come across for a long time."

She liked her legs, he knew. You can always tell by the way women who like their legs, manage, even in the longest dresses, to display them. Well, she had a right to like her legs, they were nice.

She laughed with a little gasp.

"You're rapid, David. Is that the latest romantic Southern approach?"

"I'm not a Southerner any more, I'm merely candid."

The room had become just what David had known it would become and what he had wanted it to become; soft and floating and intangible like a cloud, and everywhere you looked were white necks and arms and backs, generously communistic in the new evening gowns, and flanks and stomachs definitely outlined. And below the waists, these evening gowns accented themselves in generous and candid V's. David wasn't sure whether the owners of these necks and backs and thighs and V's were sitting on the cloud or were part of it, forming and re-forming. Anyway, it was delightful, and everything seemed pleasantly easy, and there was no hindrance of any kind.

"Thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies," he murmured with grim amusement.

"What?"

"Nothing."

He raised his eyes with some difficulty because when it came to final decisions he was still curiously shy, as he had

said, and met the long, quizzical violet eyes watching him.

"Come on," he said. "It's late. Let's get out. Let me take you home. Have you your car?"

She held his eyes for a moment, a doubt in hers. Then her eyelashes fell.

"Why? Isn't it nice here?"

"No. The air is bad, and if I take another drink I won't be able to work to-morrow."

She hesitated a moment longer, then laughed and shrugged her shoulders and got to her feet.

"All right. Yes, I have a friend's car and a chauffeur. . . . Are you safe, David? Furthermore, although you may have forgotten it, I have a husband."

David grinned down at her. "Have you? He won't want to go for hours. Besides, you don't like him."

"How do you know?"

"It's quite clear."

She was thoughtful for a moment, turning her head away and speaking slowly.

"Yes, he's pretty hateable, but I'm sorry it's so clear." She smiled up at David briskly. "All right, I'll meet you in the outside hall by the lift. . . . But are you really safe, David?"

"Do you want me to be?"

She laughed and knit her brows.

"That's one question no woman can ever truthfully answer, but I think underneath I do. Anyway, I think underneath you're nice."

David contradicted her fiercely.

"No, I'm not. I used to be, but I'm not any longer. What's the use of being nice nowadays? I've given up being nice. You go at your own risk."

She chuckled delightedly.

"Yes, you are! David, you don't know how nice and funny you are!"

He said good-night coldly to Marian and the guest of honour. He was amused at how untouched he was by Marian's indifference. One would never think that only a week before she had lain in his arms quiet and submissive. How odd! All around, everywhere in the world, were men and women who had lain in each other's arms, and not an outward sign of it, and no one knew what was going on inside their brains. Not even the other person. A gnome-like thought occurred to him. What would his aunt Annie Cordelle think if she knew he had a mistress? A mistress? One? He had had several—temporary or otherwise. And now, perhaps, he was to find another. In Aunt Annie's world, despite all evidence to the contrary, there were no such things as mistresses, except in novels and among wild people one did not recognise. Socially, Aunt Annie believed in partheno-genesis.

. . . Or, at the very least, she would assume that having a mistress was a tumultuous affair. She would not believe that David and this dark, indifferent woman were lovers. Her ideas of such relationships were derived from stories of New Orleans in its Creole hey-day.

[*To be continued.*]

The next instalment brings the story back to the island, where some fresh and original characters are introduced.

ENTERTAINING THE ISLANDERS
IN
THE JULY ISSUE

Our Contributors

GEORGE MANNING-SANDERS is the author of three novels—*Drum and Monkey*, *The Burnt Man*, and *Little Comfort*—and of a quantity of short stories. He is the husband of Ruth Manning-Sanders, the poet and novelist, and father of Joan Manning-Sanders, the young artist. For years, in order that he might be free to live his own life, he had no home but a caravan, but now lives in a fishing hamlet at Land's End, Cornwall, in a thatched cottage reconstructed from a ruin four hundred years old. Has many good friends amongst the fishermen, a hardy, independent and humour-loving remnant of unspoilt Cornwall. Most of his stories are based on these people and their activities along the stretch of harbourless rocky coast.

D. H. LAWRENCE was born in 1885 in Eastwood, a small mining town in Nottinghamshire, the fourth of five children of a coal miner. At the age of twelve he won a scholarship at Nottingham High School, and after teaching for several years in a local elementary school, spent two years at Nottingham University. He writes of much of his early life in his third novel, *Sons and Lovers*. At the age of twenty-three he came to London, was introduced to Mr. Edward Garnett and others in the literary world, and soon after published his first novel, *The White Peacock*. In 1912 he married in Germany, returning to England just before the War. In 1919 *The Rainbow* was suppressed, and this, and his feeling about the War, emphasised his antagonism to the British bourgeois public. From 1919 for two years he lived in Sicily, writing *Women in Love*, *Sea and Sardinia*, etc., settling later in Ceylon and in Australia, and later again in Mexico, when he wrote *St. Mawr* and *The Plumed Serpent*. In 1926 he returned to England, but being unable to face the climate, decided to settle once more in Italy, where he died in 1930.

The story in this issue was recently found amongst his papers and has not hitherto appeared in print.

VLADIMIR NOBOKOV-SIRIN is the eldest son of Vladimir Nobokov, a well-known Russian jurist and politician, assassinated in 1922 in Berlin by a political fanatic of the Right. He is about 35 years of age, and, after his family left Russia in 1920, was educated at Cambridge,

where he read French literature and zoology. Since then he has been living in Berlin. He began his literary career as a poet, publishing in 1921 and 1923 two books of verse. Later on he took to writing short stories. In 1925 appeared his first novel, *Mashenka*. It was followed at about a year's intervals by several others. Of these *Mashenka* and *King, Queen, Knave* have been translated into German, and *Luzhin's Defence* (under the title *La Course du Fou*) and *Camera Obscura* into French. Sirin is undoubtedly the most interesting and talented among the younger émigré writers. Several critics have spoken of his un-Russianness and the apparent superficiality and purposelessness of his writings, but his brilliance and originality are now unanimously recognised. The present story has been taken from a volume of short stories entitled *The Return of Chorb*.

ORGILL MACKENZIE is a native of Galloway and a graduate of Edinburgh University. She is the wife of the Rev. Alister MacKenzie, Vice-master of Clayesmore School, Iwerne Minster, Dorset.

Her first book, *Poems and Stories*, appeared in 1930, and was followed by *The Crooked Laburnum*, a novel.

BASIL FREESTONE is a journalist working on a weekly newspaper in Kent. He was born in 1910, and has been working as a reporter for about eight years. He was educated at a secondary school. He is very interested in short stories, and although he has written a good many, "The Dawn" is the first one to be published. He has written a novel, which is so far unpublished, and is working on another, which he hopes will not earn the same fate. So far he has done nothing of any great interest, although he intends to remedy that state of affairs at the first possible moment.

JANE ENGLAND was born in Yorkshire, is married and has three children, all boys. She was educated in scraps—first at Hamilton House, Tunbridge Wells, then in a convent in Belgium and in Dresden. She left Dresden a few weeks before the outbreak of war. She has farmed in Rhodesia and later on wrote several novels, chiefly about South Africa. She now lives in Sussex, but hopes some day to return to South Africa.

NORA LLOYD, born in 1907 in the industrial North, of Irish parents, has aspired to write short stories since the age of eight. When studying

at the Sorbonne, she made up her mind to leave her home town, and, after graduating at Sheffield University, she succeeded in getting to London. Since her graduation, she has been in turn a typist in a smelting firm, secretary to an Indian potentate and a Scottish bishop, governess to a banana-planter's children, librarian and educational organiser in a girl club, and wife to a scientist. *Johnny Dolan* is her first publication, and she is at present working on a novel.

CHRISTOPHER CHRISTIAN was born in 1910, and was educated at Charterhouse and Cambridge, where he was for a time Publicity Manager at The Festival Theatre under Terence Gray. After being apprenticed in a Printing Press, he decided he could not earn a living quickly enough. He came to London in search of journalistic work, failed and took up teaching, which he found he loved. He is chiefly interested in modern education, children's psychology, and the theatre. In 1932 he broadcast a talk on De Quincey. *The Picture* is his first story to be published, except in undergraduate magazines.

MAXWELL STRUTHERS BURT received his degree from Princetown University in 1904 and later studied at Merton College, Oxford.

He began his writing career as a reporter on the *Philadelphia Tir* , and shortly afterwards removed to Princetown as an instructor in English. In 1908 he became interested in the cattle business in Wyoming, where he generally lives throughout the summer. During the World War he served in the U.S. Air Force. Of recent years he has devoted his time to writing, spending his winters in North Carolina, and his summers on his ranch. His first book, *In the High Hills*, was published in 1914, and preluded a long line of successes culminating in *Festival*, the choice of the Book Society in 1931.

His wife, Katherine Newlin Burt, is also a writer of established reputation.